Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

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The Paris Commune Centenary 1871 - 1971

Editorial Comments

FRANCOIS HINCKER **Brief Chronology of the Commune**

MAURICE MOISSONNIER **The Experience of the Commune: Marxism and the Problems of the State**

A. L. MORTON **Britain and the Paris Commune**

PETER WYNCOLL **Thomas Smith: a Working Class Defender of the Commune**

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The Revolution in Paris: Proclamation of the Commune at the Hotel de Ville. (see "Illustrated Times," April 1, 1871, Page 194.)

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MARXISM TODAY

THEORETICAL AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

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Editorial Comments

The Paris Commune Centenary, 1871-1971

For the world working class movement this is a very special Centenary. Generations of Marxists have studied the Paris Commune in Marx's brilliant *Civil War in France* or in the many writings by Marx, Engels and Lenin, that discuss its profound significance.

Those brief 73 days from March 18th to May 28th—a minute only in the long history of revolutionary struggle, yet marking a new stage within that struggle—seem as if they were part of us.

We seem almost to live through that quick succession of events—the expansionist schemes of the old French Empire; the heroic struggle against the danger of war by French and German workers helped by the First International; the French attack and its ignominious defeat; the Government of National Defence that became so rapidly a Government of National Defection; the resistance of Paris and above all of the Parisian working class; the assumption of power by the Central Committee of the National Guard representing the working people of Paris; Versailles and a bourgeoisie that feared the armed workers more than the armies of Prussia; the election and proclamation of the Commune; the acts and works of history's first government of the working people; the Bloody Week; the barbarous repression.

All this is part of us, has become a part of the culture and tradition of the working class movement of the world.

THE WORK OF THE COMMUNE

We must not make a myth of it. Of course it was only a beginning, no fully fledged socialist government, but a first significant step in the direction of socialism.

Look for instance at the brief list of the Commune decisions drawn up by Engels in his 1891 Introduction to the *Civil War in France.* On March 26th the Commune is elected; on March 28th it is proclaimed. On March 30th it abolishes the standing army and declares that the National Guard, the armed people, is the sole armed force of France.

On the same day all payments of rent for dwelling houses from October 1870 to April 1871 are remitted, and those already paid credited as future payments. All sales of goods are stopped in the municipal pawnshops. The Commune confirms the position of foreigners elected to its Council "because the flag of the Commune is the flag of the World Republic".

On April 1st the Commune decrees that the highest wage to be paid to any of its employees is not to exceed 6,000 francs, that of an average worker. On April 2nd the Church is separated from the State. All state payments for religious purposes are abolished. Church property becomes national property, but religious practice and worship remain totally free.

On April 5th, in reply to the indiscriminate shooting of captured Communards by the Versailles troops, a decree is passed for the imprisonment of hostages, a decree which, in fact, was never carried out. On April 6th the guillotine is publicly burned. On April 12th it is decided to demolish the Victory Column in the Place de Vendome, symbol of chauvinism and military expansion.

IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

On April 16th, the Commune ordered that factories, closed down by manufacturers, should be listed, and elaborated plans for their operation by their former workers, organised in co-operative societies, and for the union of all these co-operatives into one big association.

On April 20th night work for bakers was abolished and the control of employment exchanges transferred to the respective local government authorities. On April 30th the pawnshops were closed.

What is surely surprising is not that this rapid succession of decisions was no methodical carrying out of some carefully drawn-up socialist plan, but—given the

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immense difficulties, surrounded by hostile forces, together with the deep differences of outlook within their own Communard ranks—the clarity and speed with which they were carried out. These decisions, wrote Engels in 1891:

> "decreed reforms which the republican bourgeoisie had failed to pass solely out of cowardice . . . the Commune promulgated decrees which were in direct interests of the working class and, in part, cut deeply into the old order of society".

What stands out in relief in the light of history is the extent of what was accomplished and the direction in which the Commune was moving. For what above all it lacked was *time.*

THE RULE OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

It is proper that, one hundred years later, we should ask ourselves why Marx, Engels and Lenin and so many other revolutionaries studied with such attention the Paris Commune, why it was and still remains of such significance to the working class movement.

Marxists have discussed and continue to discuss the exact nature of the political power set up by the Commune, the precise character of the revolution in process, the extent and limits of its socialist measures.

But one thing is certain, whatever the widely differing trends amongst the leaders of the National Guard and of the Commune, they were clear that power was to pass into the hands of the working class and the working people and was to be exercised in their interest. In the words of the March 18th Manifesto of the Central Committee of the National Guards:

> "The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs. . . . They have understood that it is their imperative duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power".

This, for the first time in history, was *government of the working people led by the working class—and, moreover, it worked.*

Most of the bourgeois contemporary commentators on the Commune gave utterance to virtual screams of frenzied anger. It is revealing, however, to listen to eye witnesses who had not decided in advance that workers' rule was by definition unspeakable.

For instance Edward Bowen, for forty years a schoolmaster at Harrow, the public school, spent a week of his 1871 Easter holidays visiting the Commune. On his return he wrote to his mother:[1]

> ". . . Paris is perfectly tranquil, well-governed, orderly. There is no crime, no pillage, except one or two forcible confiscations of semi-public property by central authority. Everyone is perfectly civil . . . opinion is freely expressed. . . .
>
> "In fact Paris is absolutely in the hands of its lower classes, who govern it with perfect order, and without half as much violence or crime as went on before. . . ."

"TOO HONOURABLE SCRUPULOSITY"

Bourgeois spokesmen, politicians, journalists (with the British well to the forefront) could not find words harsh or harrowing *enough to describe the Commune "atrocities".* "Never", wrote Marx to Wilhelm Liebknecht on April 6th, 1871, "has the vileness of the reptile bourgeois newspaper hacks displayed itself more splendidly".

Listen again to Edward Bowen, respectable Harrow housemaster, eyewitness, speaking sixteen years later to the local Harrow Liberal Society:

> "When I hear of the atrocities of the Commune, I always ask the person who speaks if he can mention to me an instance of a single life which was taken by order of the Commune, or during its reign. . . . My belief is that as long as that siege lasted, and till it was broken up by the entry of the troops, there was not one . . . of pillage and robbery there was none".[2]

Or speaking of the Commune press:

> "I have before me a pile of newspapers that were sold by thousands in the streets, the typical journals of the time. . . . Find, if you can, in one of these a single word of instigation to disorder, to outrage, or to cruelty. And all the while not only the newspapers of Versailles, but the Assembly itself, was proclaiming every day that the criminals of Paris must be taken and shot".[3]

If the first government of the working class and the working people erred, they erred in their generosity to their adversaries, in what Marx once called their "too honourable scrupulosity"[4] As Lenin put it:

> "The proletariat stopped half-way . . . institutions such as the Bank were not seized. The second error was unnecessary magnanimity of the proletariat. Instead of annihilating its enemies, it endeavoured to gain moral influence on them, it did not attach the right value to the importance of purely military activity in civil war, and instead of crowning its victory in Paris by a determined advance on Versailles, it hesitated and gave time to the Versailles Govern-

[1] Rev. The Hon. W. E. Bowen M.A.—"Edward Bowen: a Memoir", Longmans, Green & Co, 1902, pp. 130-132.
[2] *Op. cit.* p. 348.
[3] *Op. cit.* p. 350.
[4] Karl Marx, *Letter to Kugelmann*, April 12th, 1871.

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ment to gather its dark forces and to prepare for the bloody May week".[5]

THE COMMUNE AND THE STATE

Of all the lessons of the Commune perhaps there is none more pertinent today than that connected with the state.

Engels, in his 1891 *Introduction* to *The Civil War in France* describes how in Germany the state (i.e. the existing bourgeois state) was viewed with a sort of reverence and awe not only by the bourgeoisie but by many workers. It was seen as almost a philosophical idea, a Kingdom of God on earth, the realisation of eternal Truth and Justice.

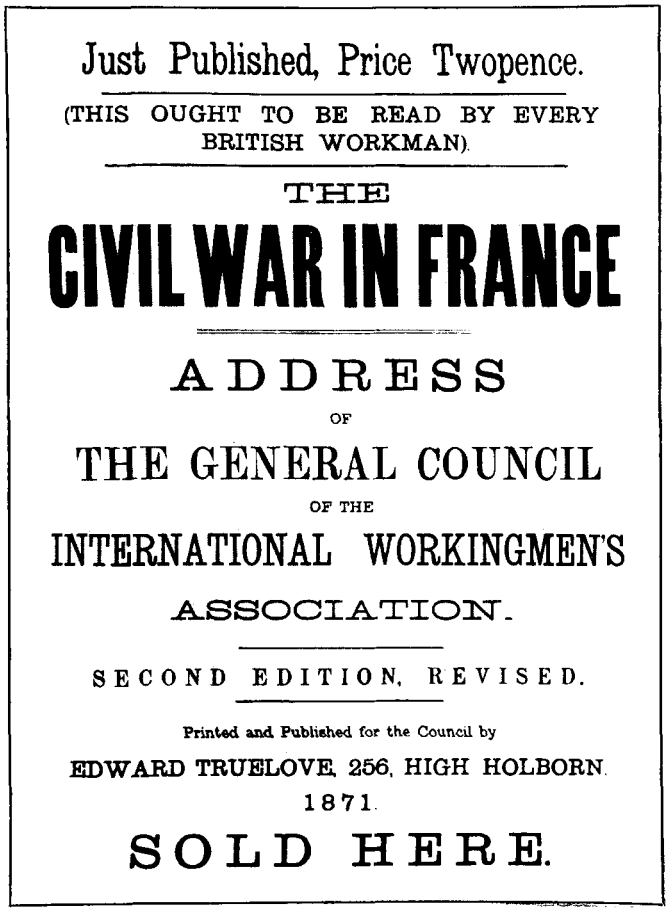
The experience of the Commune with the state is certainly not less important for the workers of 1971 than it was for those of one hundred years ago. In Britain the right-wing reformist leaders, whose ideas still influence a mass of workers, see the state (i.e. the existing capitalist state) not as a philosophical idea, but, in their pragmatic fashion, as a piece of neutral machinery, unbiased and above classes, which must be respected, conserved, and even made more strong.

"The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes". This was one of the prime lessons from the Commune drawn by Marx in *The Civil War in France*. It must develop its own state that will serve the working people.

It was this precisely that the Commune began to do. It was the first attempt, wrote Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, "of a proletarian revolution to break up the bourgeois state machine and the political form 'at last discovered' which can and must *take the place* of the one broken up".

Of course in its brief and difficult 73 days the Commune could only begin this process. It was able, wrote Lenin in the same work, "within a few weeks to *start* building a *new* proletarian state machinery by introducing

[5] Lenin, *Zagranichnaya Gazeta*, No. 2. March 23rd, 1908.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(THIS OUGHT TO BE READ BY EVERY BRITISH WORKMAN).

THE

CIVIL WAR IN FRANCE

ADDRESS

OF

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL WORKINGMEN'S

ASSOCIATION.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED.

Printed and Published for the Council by

EDWARD TRUELOVE, 256, HIGH HOLBORN.

1871.

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Poster announcing the appearance of the second edition of "The Civil War in France"

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measures to secure wider democratisation, the uprooting of bureaucracy".

A GREAT ADVANCE OF DEMOCRACY

The Commune was elected by universal suffrage. It acted in the closest collaboration with the working people and their mass organisations like the Clubs, for instance, the trade unions or the women's organisations.[6]

The standing (professional) army so often directed against the people (as in December 1851 or in the strikes of 1859) was at once suppressed and replaced by the National Guard, the armed people.

The police were, in the words of *The Civil War in France*, "stripped of their political attributes and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agents of the Commune".

By its decree of March 29th the Commune became directly responsible, too, for public administration. It decreed (though time did not permit that this should become a reality) that administrative posts, like those in Education and Justice, should be both elected and subject to recall. Whilst, as we have said, it limited to 6,000 francs the wages of state functionaries, which brought them on a level with those of the workers, the members of the Commune itself were limited to a still lower wage of 5,475 francs a year.

The Commune was itself formed of councillors elected in the various wards of Paris, who were both responsible and subject to recall. The aim was that a network of such Communes should cover the country from the cities to the smallest village.

It was only a beginning. The Commune was, as it were, feeling its way, learning from experience, but represented nonetheless a great qualitative advance of democracy on anything hitherto known, a step towards a democracy of the working people and a new type of state.

PATRIOTS AND INTERNATIONALISTS

The French Revolution of 1789 had already shown that the aristocracy, self-styled flower of France, preferred Coblentz to Paris, emigration to the capitals of their traditional enemies to France of the revolution.

With the Commune the history of betrayal took a new step forward. Now it was the bourgeoisie, the self-styled patriots, flag-wagging, sanctimonious, who sold out to the enemy, or rather paid the enemy (the Prussians) to defend them from their own people.

"Paris armed", wrote Marx in *The Civil War in France,* "was the Revolution armed. A victory of Paris over the Prussian aggression would have been a victory of the French workmen over the French capitalist and his state parasites".

Faced with the conflict between national and class interests, the French bourgeoisie, without hesitation, chose the conservation of its privilege, and sold out. "The Government of National Defence did not hesitate to turn into a Government of National Defection". They embraced the Prussians or rather licked their boots.

From Thiers "capitulard" to Quisling Petain and collaborator Laval it is a long time but a very short step!

The patriotism of the Communards like the patriotism of the Resistance forces of World War II, led by the French Communists, went hand in hand with their internationalism.

The Red Flag was the banner of the Communards, symbol of the future World Republic. They pulled down the Vendome Column, symbol of blind nationalism. The Commune itself was international. Among its leaders were Italians like Amilcare Cipriani, Belgians, Russians like Elisabeth Dmitrieff, Hungarians like Frankel, Poles like Dombrowski.

It became a magnet to revolutionaries throughout the world and for ever won their admiration and respect. As Marx wrote (once again in *The Civil War):*

> "Within sight of the Prussian Army that had annexed to Germany two French provinces, the Commune annexed to France the working people all over the world".

WHO WERE THE INCENDIARIES?

Nothing could have been more vile than the torrents of calumny poured out by the bourgeois press. The gentlemanly press of Britain excelled itself.

There is a sort of frenzied madness in which a class that feels endangered hurls insults at those whom it sees as the enemy, and in which it attributes to its adversary the summation of its own barbarity.

We know this well in Britain from the 18th century outpourings against "the mob", or Burke's ranting against "the swinish multitude", or the shrieks of immorality

[6] The Chapter on "The Commune and the People" in "*La Commune de 1871*" by Bruhat, Tersen and Dautry, Editions sociales, 1970, is very instructive on this point.

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against the early Owenites, or the countless calumnies against the Communist Party.

Thiers and his men and their echoes throughout the world attributed to the Commune every act in which they themselves had been caught in guilt.

The Communards were incendiaries, shouted Versailles, the women of the Commune "petroleuses". Marx well asked:[7]

> "When British troops wantonly set fire to the Capitol at Washington and to the summer palace of the Chinese emperor, was that incendiarism?
>
> "When Thiers, during six weeks, bombarded Paris, under the pretext that he wanted to set fire to those houses only in which there were people, was that incendiarism?"

Listen once again to Edward Bowen delivering his lecture to the audience of the Harrow Liberal Club in 1887:[8]

> "You have probably heard the word *Petroleuse*. The story ran that women had gone about with petroleum, setting fire to houses out of mere malice. Every woman who looked ragged or could not stammer out a good account of herself, fell under suspicion, and no sooner was the cry of *petroleuse* raised than all hope of that woman was gone.
>
> "No one knows how many wretched creatures perished under the accusation.
>
> "Well it was false from first to last".

Thiers shouted incendiary whilst he bombarded Paris, as Hitler who had burnt the *Reichstag* accused the German Communists, and the American imperialists indict the Vietnamese of atrocities whilst they water their land with napalm.

THE REPRESSION

The Mur des Federes still stands at the Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris in Engels' words as "a mute but eloquent testimony to the frenzy of which the ruling class is capable as soon as the working class dares to stand up for its rights".

All know of the mass indiscriminate arrests, the shooting of prisoners, mock-trials, long sentences and deportations to the distant penal settlements. Many research workers in recent years have tried to find the full extent of this repression.

The "modest" figure of 17,000 executions, was given at the time in the Report of General Appert, Chief of Military "Justice", based on the cost of burials. But burial to Thiers and the Versaillais was no nice Christian ceremony. Thousands were thrown unaccounted into pits and mass graves, or ponds, or the river Seine. Some say 20,000 were executed. Other 35,000.

As the London *Evening Standard* wrote at the time, no-one will ever know the true figure.

Some 40,000 were arrested. Many were hustled and herded before the elegant crowds of Versailles to be jeered at, spat on, struck. Some 20,000 were sent to the Satory Camp. Some 8,000 deported (often in convict ships like the Tolpuddle Martyrs) to the penal settlements of New Caledonia.

Thiers boasted "no-one will speak of socialism again . . . we have finished with it".

Professor Bruhat and his colleagues estimate around 100,000 as the number of those killed, imprisoned, deported or forced into exile, following the Commune.[9] Examination of the dossiers of 35,000 of those arrested has shown that all but 16 per cent were of the working class.

Thus killed, imprisoned, exiled or deported, was roughly one quarter of the adult working class population of Paris of the time.

THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

To discuss the weaknesses of the Commune is not, in any way, to belittle its achievements. Indeed the very discussion is a measure of recognition of its deep significance.

Certainly one of the greatest shortcomings was the lack of a central organisation with a clear perspective. "There was no workers' party" wrote Lenin:[10]

> "the working class, which in the mass was unprepared and untrained, did not even clearly visualise its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them. There were no serious political organisations of the proletariat, no strong trade unions and co-operative societies."

There has been much work carried out in recent years by French Marxists and others on the class composition of Paris at the time of the Commune, on the political trends within the Commune, and on the role of the French Section of the First International.[11]

Some 25 of the 90 elected members of the Commune were of the working class, it is estimated, and these not from large-scale industry but in the main from small or medium enterprises.

Within the ranks of the Communards

[7] *The Civil War in France.*
[8] *Op. cit.* pp. 354-5.
[9] *Op. cit.* in Chapter on the Repression.
[10] "In Memory of the Commune", Rabochaya Gazeta. No. 4-5, April 15th (28), 1911.
[11] We shall be publishing an article on this subject by Professor Bruhat in a subsequent issue of *Marxism Today*.

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were Blanquists, Jacobins (republicans tinged with socialism, men of '48) and what could be called independent radicals. There were supporters of Proudhon and those who, to a greater or lesser extent, were influenced by Marx. In the opinion of Professor Bruhat and his colleagues[12] only Frankel and Serrailler can be considered as really close to Marx.

The role of the members of the French Section of the International was very positive, indeed decisive, and they were aided greatly by the advice received from Marx and the Council of the First International. But they cannot be seen as a unified group. Indeed of the 30 or so members of the International elected to the Commune the majority were in varying degrees under Proudhon's influence.

A NEW POINT OF DEPARTURE

With all weaknesses, lack of leadership, at times indecision, such were the achievements of the Commune, that it will live for ever. For it contained the seeds of the future, was a "glorious harbinger of a new society", forerunner of the October Revolution of 1917.

It was not by chance that Marx, Engels, Lenin and so many other revolutionaries, saw in it an event of unprecedented significance, examined it so attentively, perceived within it the stirrings of the future.

It was no ready-made socialist society, no blueprint for revolution to be imitated mechanically. But it was the first achievement of political power by the working people, even if in a small area and for a brief time. It is an inspiration to all, learning its lessons, to find their own road to socialism.

Some seem to sink at times into the depths of scholastic discussions—should the Communards have fought, could they have won? Perhaps Marx himself gave the most appropriate reply in mid-April, 1871.[13]

Versailles, he wrote:

> "presented the Parisians with the alternative of either taking up the fight or succumbing without a struggle".

Faced with such a choice:

> "The demoralisation of the working class would have been a far greater misfortune.
>
> "*Whatever the immediate outcome may be, a new point of departure of world-wide importance has been gained*" (our emphasis).

* * *

AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS

We would like to thank our colleagues of *Nouvelle Critique,* in Paris, and in particular Francois Hincker, for all the help they have given us in preparing this special issue of *Marxism Today,* along with articles on the Commune which will be published in April and May.

The article of Maurice Moissonnier and one on "Students in the Commune" by Jacques Girault (which we shall publish later) have appeared in a special issue of *Nouvelle Critique.*

We should like, too, to thank for his help Stanley Hutchins, who for over 50 years has spent much time studying the Commune and compiling what is probably the largest collection in this country of material of every sort related to the Commune. He has made a special study of the fate of the Communard exiles in Britain, and we are glad to publish a part of the fruits of his researches.

The British working class showed their solidarity at the time with those Communard exiles and (though insufficiently) with the cause of the Commune. We feel that knowledge of the life of these exiles in Britain is part of the heritage of our working class movement, and should as such be cherished.

AND AN APOLOGY

We must at the same time apologise to our readers for the fact that some important contributions that had been announced are not contained in this special issue.

The postal strike prevented us from obtaining the article by Professor Bruhat on political trends within the Commune, that was to have been a key contribution. We shall publish it as soon as we are able.

We shall publish too in the issues of April and May part of the article by Girault on "Students in the Commune" and the remainder of that by Stanley Hutchins.

[12] *Op. cit.* Chapter on "Composition and Trends of the Leadership of the Commune".

[13] *Letter to Kugelmann,* April 17th, 1871.

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Brief Chronology of the Commune

François Hincker

JULY 12th, 1870	Manifesto of the Paris Sections of the First International against the (Franco-Prussian) War.
JULY 19th, 1870	Outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War.
JULY 23rd, 1870	First Address of the General Council of the International to all members.
AUGUST 4th—SEPTEMBER 2nd, 1870	French defeats and demonstrations against the Empire in Paris. That on August 14th led by the Blanquists.
SEPTEMBER 2nd, 1870	The defeat at Sedan.
SEPTEMBER 4th, 1870	Proclamation of the Republic and establishment of a "Government of National Defence".
SEPTEMBER 9th, 1870	Address of the French Section of the International.
SEPTEMBER 18th, 1870	Beginning of the siege of Paris.
SEPTEMBER 22nd, 1870	The Central Republican Committee of 20 arrondissements (districts) of Paris, established on September 5th, issues the first call for the establishment of the Commune.
OCTOBER 5th, 1870	Demonstration in Paris demanding arms and an offensive.
OCTOBER 8th, 1870	Further demonstration.
OCTOBER 30th, 1870	The Government of National Defence prepares to negotiate an Armistice.
OCTOBER 31st, 1870	The National Guard occupy the Hotel de Ville (Town Hall) for a time but are unable to establish a new government.
Beginning of NOVEMBER 1870	Demonstrations of the people at Lyons and Marseilles.
JANUARY 5th, 1871	Beginning of the bombardment of Paris by the German artillery.
JANUARY 7th, 1871	The "red poster" ("L'affiche rouge") of the Central Committee of the 20 Paris arrondissements, appears, concluding with the slogan —"Make way for the Commune".
JANUARY 21st, 1871	Meeting by the National Guard who release a number of those imprisoned on October 31st.
JANUARY 22nd, 1871	Big demonstrations in front of the Hotel de Ville broken up. Democratic clubs and papers suppressed during the following days.
JANUARY 28th, 1871	Armistice.
FEBRUARY 8th, 1871	Elections for a National Assembly. Overwhelming majority for the two Monarchist groups. The Assembly meets at Bordeaux on February 12th.
FEBRUARY 15th, 1871	The Assembly abolishes payment for the National Guard.
FEBRUARY 19th, 1871	Thiers becomes head of the Government.
FEBRUARY 26th, 1871	The people of Paris remove the cannon of the National Guard and the garrison of Paris to Montmartre.
MARCH 1st-2nd, 1871	Occupation of the eastern part of Paris by the Germans in the course of three days.
MARCH 3rd, 1871	Establishment of the Republican Federation of the National Guard.
MARCH 10th, 1871	The National Assembly is transferred to Versailles. The Moratorium on debts and rents is lifted.
MARCH 11th, 1871	Vinoy, Governor of Paris, suppresses Republican newspapers.

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MARCH 15th, 1871	Establishment of the Central Committee of the National Guard.
MARCH 18th, 1871	The people of Paris prevent attempts by the Government to recapture the cannon (of the National Guard). Government offices leave Paris for Versailles.
MARCH 19th, 1871	The Central Committee of the National Guard decide to call elections for a Council of the Commune.
MARCH 22nd-25th, 1871	Communes established at Lyons Marseilles, Narbonne, Toulouse, St. Etienne.
MARCH 25th, 1871	Elections in Paris. Defeat of the Lyons Commune.
MARCH 26th 1871	Commune established at Creusot.
MARCH 28th, 1871	Announcement of the results of the elections for the Council of the Commune. From this time on, the Commune really exists. Defeat of the Communes at Toulouse and St. Etienne.
MARCH 30th, 1871	Re-introduction of the Moratorium on rents.
MARCH 31st, 1871	Defeat of the Creusot Commune.
APRIL 2nd, 1871	Separation of the Church from the State in Paris. The Commune fixes maximum salaries for civil servants. The battle at Courbevoie marks the beginning of the war between Versailles and the Commune.
APRIL 3rd, 1871	Defeat of the Communards before Mont Valérien.
APRIL 4th, 1871	Defeat of the Commune at Marseilles.
APRIL 8th, 1871	Opening of municipal workshops for women workers.
APRIL 11th, 1871	Establishment of the Union of Women.
APRIL 12th, 1871	Re-introduction of the Moratorium on debts.
APRIL 16th, 1871	Supplementary elections for the Council of the Commune. Decree transferring to the workers enterprises abandoned by those owners who had fled to Versailles.
APRIL 25th, 1871	Requisition of empty dwelling places.
APRIL 27th, 1871	Prohibition of fines on workers by employers and deductions from their wages.
APRIL 28th, 1871	Proclamation by the Commune to the Peasants. Banning of night work in bakeries. Establishment of a Commission for Education.
MAY 1st, 1871	Establishment of a Committee of Public Safety.
MAY 7th, 1871	Decree making withdrawals from Municipal Pawnshops easier.
MAY 13th, 1871	Co-operatives of small shopkeepers given priority in the public markets.
MAY 19th, 1871	Secularisation of Education.
MAY 21st, 1871	Versailles' troops enter Paris by the Porte du Point du Jour and occupy the South-West of Paris during the night.
MAY 22nd, 1871	The Commune issues a call to arms.
MAY 23rd, 1871	The Versailles troops occupy the remaining part of the West of Paris including Montmartre, where Dombrovski is killed.
MAY 25th, 1871	Last meeting of the Council of the Commune.
MAY 27th, 1871	The Communards now only hold the North-East of Paris. Battles in the Père Lachaise cemetery where Communards are executed in front of a wall which has gone down in history as *le Mur des Fédérés*—the Wall of the Federals.
MAY 28th, 1871	The last shot fired by the Commune at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.
MAY 30th, 1871	Marx's address—"The Civil War in France" issued.
JUNE-AUGUST 1871	Military Tribunals in action. Repression. The last execution for participation in the Commune took place on June 6th 1874.
MARCH 1879	Partial amnesty introduced.

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The Experience of the Commune:
Marxism and the Problems of the State

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May 10th 1871. On that Wednesday, the Commune had just over two weeks of life left. Exactly 18 days remained before the last shots in the rue de Tourtille rang out its death knell. And yet, despite its brief existence, the Commune had already lived long enough for its essential character to have impressed itself upon contemporaries who lived through the experience: on that date, in the *Tribune du Peuple*, a journalist signing himself Marius declared in a few lines that something decisive had just taken place in the history of the working class, and that the political life of the State was no longer a domain reserved to the "natural superiors" of the workers, that is to say the propertied classes:

> " Go out into the streets. Listen. A whole people is discussing serious questions; for the first time you can hear working men exchanging views on problems which only philosophers had tackled before. A new age has dawned".

For what had arisen from the common people was a new type of philosopher, as proclaimed in the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways, the point is to *change* it". Here then was a moment charged with history, a moment when men "change the circumstances" and when . . . "it is essential to educate the educator himself", a moment when "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived *and rationally* understood only as *revolutionary practice*".[1]

How outrageous of the world of labour to make this Promethean appropriation of political thought and power! It was an offence calling for exemplary punishment. The ferocity of right-thinking people against "the foot soldiers, apothecary assistants and stable lads"[2] who had suddenly "gone giddy"[3] would have to equal the great fright they had suffered. On the barricade of the rue Houdon, after it had fallen into the hands of the forces of order, a Versailles colonel gave expression to the reactions of his class just before he murdered Lévêque, member of the central committee of the National Guard: "Who are you?—a bricklayer! A bricklayer thought he would govern France!"[4]

From '48 to '71

It remains to be seen how this sacrilegious novelty came about. In February 1848 the Paris workers and the common people had demanded no more than a democratic republic to look after their problems and to which they were ready to "sacrifice three months of hard times". The social aspirations of those who were the most revolutionary remained as vague as they were urgent, but the masses were not ready, either objectively or subjectively, for the establishment of an *effective popular power*. In the intoxicating mood of fraternity of the spring of '48 people were still satisfied with raising their hats in grand gestures to the revolutionary cap and smock of 1789; it was still considered sufficient that a few symbolic representatives should serve as hostages to the masters of the new regime. The working class had to suffer the hard times "but the conditions for its own movement

[1] *Third Thesis on Feuerbach.*

[2] These significant expressions come from the pen of Maxime du Camp in his *Les Convulsions de Paris*, Vol. II.

[3] Another illuminating expression taken from the report of Martial Delpit for the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Insurrection of March 18th 1871, Vol. II p. 11.

[4] See Lissagaray: *Histoire de la Commune de 1871*, followed by Bruhat-Dautry-Tersen: *La Commune de 1871* (Editions sociales, p. 117) and Tristan Remy: *La Commune â Montmartre* (Editions Sociales, p. 85).

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did not yet exist".[5] This was the time of the Socialist sects and of their impotence.

In March 1871, 23 years later, changes had taken place and the situation was—despite certain appearances, despite the persistence of certain ambiguities—very different in reality.

1. "Once the scientific foundation is laid, popularisation is easy"[6]

To seize power, you must first have a plan and take part in *real* political struggles to put it into effect. Towards 1864, the great mass of the French working class movement had not recognised its objective to be the taking of power, even after the tragic lesson of 1848. It was still distracted by the powerful Proudhonist influences which maintained distrust of any concrete political action. However, during the 1860s and down to the proclamation of the Commune, in the multiform organisations in which the workers gathered together and developed their class consciousness, a hard battle was waged against that persistent utopianism which maintained the illusion that the new society could be born in the name of justice and ideal morality without there being any need to bother with class struggles in all their aspects.

Political Trends

The role of the First International was vital in the fight against these crippling ideas. From its birth, in proclaiming that "*the economic emancipation of the workers is the great aim to which the whole political movement must be subordinated*", it fixed the objective while at the same time indicating how the organised working class could bring about the decisive transformation of society. Later on, in the congresses but "far more in the private dealings of the General Council with the individual sections", the ideological ventures of "sects and amateur experiments which attempted to assert themselves within the International itself against the genuine movement of the working class" were frustrated.[7]

Unquestionably, against the theses of the impenitent utopianists, Marx maintained a constant ideological pressure, but it is difficult to assess it properly as the channels through which ideas circulated in the International have yet to be fully explored by the historians.

In September 1869, at the Basle Congress, two conceptions still confronted each other. One proceeded from a Proudhonism gone mad and adorned with catastrophic perspectives in Bakuninist word-spinning. In point of fact, the delegate who gave expression to this conception, the Belgian leader Hins, pirouetted away from the fundamental problem of seizing power: "The International must be a State within the State . . . let them carry on as they like until our State has become the strongest. Then, on the ruins of their State, we shall erect ours, which will be ready and fully developed, *just as it exists in each section*. Get out and let me sit down, that will be the point!"[8]

The opposing tendency, corresponding with Marx's thought and expressed by Wilhelm Liebknecht, denounced such a dangerous simplification".

> "Beat the empty air, pursue abstract questions! But as for those you can touch with your finger, living questions you can grasp hold of: stop there! It is dangerous to preach this kind of political inactivity, to manufacture phrases and put your hands back in your pockets at the sight of the first gendarme. Tell people to stand aloof and you put yourself on the same ground as the reactionaries."[9]

Marx and the International

Besides, in the letter to Bolte already quoted, Marx expressed himself clearly on the question of the relationship between economic struggles, political struggles and, the liberation of the working class, and it is certain that those are the points of view for which he sought to win acceptance within the International:

> "The political movement of the working class has as its object, of course, the conquest of political power for the working class, and for this it is naturally necessary that a previous organisation of the working class, itself arising from its economic struggles, should have been developed up to a certain point. . . .
>
> "Where the working class is not well enough organised to wage a decisive campaign against the collective power, that is to say, against the political power of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against the political attitude adopted by the ruling classes, an attitude which is hostile to us. Otherwise, it will remain a plaything in their hands. . . ."[10]

In a style which is characteristic of him, Martial Delpit, the main rapporteur of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Insurrection of March 18th, noted a similar evolution brought about by the same necessity:

> ". . . To propose a quest for purely theoretical solutions for Communist appetites was a dream which may have beguiled a few visionary spirits,

[5] K. Marx: *The Civil War in France*—First Draft.
[6] Marx to Kugelmann, December 28th, 1862.
[7] Marx to Bolte, November 29th, 1871 (*Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, pp. 326-329).
[8] J. Guillaume: *L'Internationale*, Vol. I, p. 195.
[9] *La Démocratie*, September 12th, 1869.
[10] Marx to Bolte, November 29th, 1871.

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but which was unattainable. The International was bound to arrive at pure Communism, that is to say to place its force in support of those who would offer it the simplest and—for the great majority the most intelligible—fulfilment of the hopes for social improvements in the name of which it had been created".

One of the major objectives pursued by Marx at the head of the General Council in London was to prevent the workers from being manipulated by the bourgeoisie, to get them to demonstrate their political existence in action.

Political Struggle

By reason of the evolution of the State which, under the Second Empire, took on its "most prostituted" form and developed into a blatant "means of enslaving labour to capital"[11], and in the light also of the shaking this State received in 1869 and 1870 from the growing pressure of the popular forces, the ideas of Marx and the practical direction they took to had been more readily accepted in every quarter. If one examines the correspondence of certain prominent militants of the International Working Men's Association, one sees that the conviction was gradually growing among them that there was no other way than that of daily political struggle. Some of them had even discovered that the transformation of society must inevitably be preceded by the winning of power. On August 15th 1869, Varlin, in a letter to Emile Aubry expressed this trend clearly:

> "I must tell you that, for us, political revolution and social reform are linked and the one cannot proceed without the other. On its own, political revolution would be nothing, but we fully understand that, in all the circumstances confronting us, it will be impossible to organise the social revolution while we are living under a Government as arbitrary as that under which we live now".[12]

On December 25th 1869, this same Varlin considered that the situation did not allow "the Socialist Party to remain divorced from politics. At this moment", he explained, "the approaching collapse of the Empire comes before everything else and Socialists must either take the lead in the movement or stand aside". This opinion was shared by Benoît Malon who, on January 26th 1870, told[13] Richard, the Lyons leader, that "the revolution was advancing, with inevitability, that it was still open to many influences" and that "to stand aside in these conditions would be (for the International) the most disastrous line of conduct possible, for it would entail surrendering the movement to the leadership of the pure politicians".[14] Thus, when Engels wrote to Sorge that the Commune "was completely the child of the International *in its spirit* (my italics—M.M.), although the International had not lifted its little finger to produce it",[15] this is the first thing to consider, this rapid evolution of the leading activists of the French working-class movement, of their acquisition of political consciousness, of their discovery of the ways and means of putting their determination to transform society into effect.

II. "To save its purse, the bourgeoisie must lose its own crown"[16]

Special circumstances also encouraged the development of political initiative in the proletariat: these were the abdication of a bourgeoisie which had delegated its responsibilities to the Bonapartist clique so that it might devote itself, under the protection of a sword which for long had remained effective, to the profit-making schemes made possible by the economic expansion of the years 1850-60.

With his usual lucidity, Marx, in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", illuminated this degradation of the ruling class which, "in order to enjoy in tranquillity property, family, religion, order", was obliged to put on a mask of democratic institutions.

In the long run, this was a dangerous undertaking; when the ruling class renounced political combat and handed over command to the adventurers of the imperial court, it was condemning itself to a political vacuum and was slipping into unfortunate habits in a country where the democratic tradition had already taken root. Proof that this was so came in the collapse of the "Liberal Empire" and of the "Parliamentary Empire". When he took it upon himself to wipe out the famous "black spots" which had appeared on the horizon, Napoleon III began to dream of an impossible conversion: "I shall look after order, help me to establish liberty!"

The Torpor of the Bourgeoisie

It is sufficient to refer to the reports of the imperial procurators to note that, for the most part, the bourgeoisie disappointed his expectations, because it had over 18 years lost the ability to act

[11] *The Civil War in France.*

[12] Third Proceedings of the International in Paris (Paris, 1870, p. 22).

[13] Quoted in E. Jeloubovskaya: *La Chute du Second Empire et les Débuts de la Troisième République*, (Moscow 1969, p. 230).

[14] Municipal Archives of Lyons, File of A. Richard, 1[2] 56B.

[15] Letter of September 12th 1874.

[16] K. Marx: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*

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for itself. On April 16th, 1869, the procurator of Lyons complained of the "indifference" and the "*torpor*" of the bourgeois under his jurisdiction.[17] At the same time, the banker Edouard Aynard used the same words to observe that "the classes endowed with wealth, education and liberal traditions", "crushed between the State which abases all individuality, and radical democracy whose materialist emanations reveal tendencies designed to sadden a free spirit . . . seem to await their fate in *torpor*".[18] Finally, the Vicomte de Meaux, in his report to the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into March 18th, 1871, deplored the fact that the conservatives—who had been "accustomed by the Empire to slumber while they trusted in authority" and were then "suddenly and painfully awoken—spent too long asking where authority lay, who would be the Government and what it would do, and when and where they would find safety".[19]

On top of this momentary inability to produce the goods on the democratic front,[20] the bourgeoisie suffered another handicap: the impossibility of producing the goods on the patriotic front.

In 1870-71, the deception of bourgeois nationalism could indeed be discerned by the least aware: "Not an inch of our territory, not a stone of our fortresses", proclaimed Jules Favre. But he was only trying to find a way to surrender as quickly as possible without losing face; to continue the struggle would have entailed arming the whole population, including those honoured with the name of demagogues who were the most ready to fight . . . and there lay the greatest danger!

More Fear of Riots than Prussians

General Trochu, before the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of the Government of National Defence, did not fail in his defensive evidence to emphasise this contradiction between words and deeds:

> "What!" he said, "in the face of this tremendous danger, a military operation surpassing belief—the siege of Paris—you then call an entire population to arms! You excite it and you fill its belly with fire, telling it that it must hold back the enemy across a vast battlefield every day. And, when this population responds to your call enthusiastically to a man, you imagine that one chooses, that one can choose between the demagogues and the conservatives!"[21]

"When the siege was about to begin", wrote Martial Delpit for his part, "weapons of precision were handed out to everybody without distinction and none of them was destroyed; it was difficult to do anything else. The enemy was approaching and public opinion was concerned only with the question of national defence".[22] Such a situation quickly led the "men of order" to give up all will to fight. Francisque Sarcey, in writing of the time when a band from the Figaro newspaper was serving as guides to the Prussian outposts, describes the situation with no indignation: "The bourgeoisie saw itself, rather mournfully, caught between the Prussians who had their boot on its throat, and those it called the reds, people it could see only as armed with daggers and devouring the promise of pillage to come. I really believe that at that time, towards the end of September, the bourgeoisie had more fear of riots than it did of the Prussians".[23]

Thus, at the end of the war, the traditional political cadres crumbled. Degraded by the Empire, the ruling classes confessed themselves incapable of taking command of their own destiny. The imperial administration, for its part, had been thrown into utter disrepute by the fall of the regime, while the illusion of "national defence" lasted for only a moment and the provisional Government, lacking confidence and vulnerable, became increasingly inclined to see capitulation as a situation corresponding with the bourgeoisie's class interests and quickly took on the aspect of a Government of "national defection".

The Red Poster

These conditions explain the content of the poster of the Central Committee of the 20 Arrondissements, drawn up by Leverdays, Vaillant, Tridon and Vallès, the famous red poster of January 6th 1871:

> "They have thought only of negotiating instead of casting cannons and manufacturing weapons.

[17] National Archives, BB[30] 389.

[18] E. Aynard: *Le Suffrage Commercial et la Situation Politique à Lyons*, (Lyon, 1869, p. 31).

[19] *Parliamentary Inquiry into March 18th, 1871*, p. 62.

[20] In 1871—and on the whole from 1848 onwards—the big bourgeoisie in France was precluded by virtue of its class interests from participating in the democratic contest, but history also shows that it had learnt from experience and that, aware of the dangers of authoritarian solutions, it had learnt again to *give the illusion* of loyalty to democracy. The sharpness of the class struggles in our country has favoured—dialectically—the creation of a ruling oligarchy used to the subtleties of political contests. The present period is full of examples of this ability to take apparent charge of the democratic future of the country. After all, the Government party now calls itself the "Union for the Defence of the Republic". One could make similar observations about another sphere, that of the defence of the national interest.

[21] *Inquiry*, op. cit. p. 128.

[22] *Inquiry into the Events of March 18th, p.* 38.

[23] F. Sarcey: *Le Siège de Paris* (Paris, Flammarion, pp. 73, 104).

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"—They have left the Bonapartists in place and imprisoned the Republicans.

"—By their time-wasting, their indecision, their inertia, they have led us to the edge of the abyss: they have known neither how to govern nor how to fight, when they had at their command all the resources, the provisions and the men.

"—The Government has shown what it is capable of—killing us. The salvation of Paris calls for a quick decision—the Government responds to the reproaches of public opinion with only threats. It declares that it will maintain *order*—as Bonaparte did before Sedan! !"

This balance sheet of bankruptcy led to a conclusion which the poster stated bluntly:

"The policy. the strategy, the administration of the Government of September 4th, constituted out of the Empire, have been judged. *Make way for the People, make way for the Commune*".[24]

The same idea was to be expressed more radiantly on the eve of the elections in the Official Journal of the Commune, dated March 27th, 1871, which published a proclamation of the provisional council of the Fifth Arrondissement:

". . . The other classes, in reducing the country to the point of death, have shown their impotence and their decrepitude—they have lost the right to call themselves the only governing classes.

"Make way for honesty, work, justice—open the door to the educated proletariat, to the real people, to the only class which bears no responsibility for our misery and degradation, to the only one, finally, capable of saving the country".

In less than three months, the content of this thought had been enriched, its formulation, while taking a more theoretical turn, had gained in precision and bite; this text constitutes the veritable manifesto of a rising class staking its claim over the future.

III. "I remit the power of the tribune to each section of the French Republic"[25]

It is no accident that the international working-class movement should have begun to elaborate a theory of the State, starting from the French experience of the Commune. France, "a country in which class struggles have been carried to the end", provided the favourable conditions because of a long democratic experience which could inspire "creativity" in the masses.

The heritage of the Parisian "sans culotterie" is not to be ignored. The "sans culottes", writes Albert Soboul[26], were moving:

"not towards a liberal democracy as conceived by the bourgeoisie, but towards a popular democracy. Control of elected representatives, the right of the people to recall them, certain voting procedures by open vote or acclamation—these were all signs that the revolutionaries did not intend to be satisfied with a formal democracy . . . they conceived the Republic as a democracy in action".

We can recognise in the methods and political ideas of the Communards—which were accompanied, it is true, by illusions and were dressed up in the characteristic phraseology of neo-Jacobinism—the resurgence of the advanced ideas expressed by the Parisian popular democracy in the 1790s.

The Historical Heritage

These ideas had already reappeared in the period when the Empire was tottering, in meetings where the binding mandate and means of exercising permanent control over elected representatives were discussed, where the revolutionary past was studied in the search for models that could be adapted to the needs of the moment. This is why it seems to me that the accusation generally attributed to the Commune by certain historians, that it was *only* the repetition of the past, derives from a serious lack of comprehension of the course taken by the evolution of history. Marx was able to unravel that part of the heritage which could play a positive role.

While warning the Paris workers against indulging in memories of 1792, while stressing that their task was not "to re-enact the past but to build the future", he paid great attention to the democratic forms developed during the bourgeois revolution, and to a whole experience that the masses on the move could re-evaluate and enrich. The proof of this is to be found in *The Civil War* where he included among his notes articles 62 to 80 of the 1793 Constitution, indicating the role of the communes and that of the municipal officials, and the district and departmental administrators, as well as the method of their election and recall.[27]

Living Democracy

But the historical heritage was regenerated in a way responding to the exceptional situation Paris was then experiencing. As the days passed,

[24] *Murailles politiques de France*—If, as J. Rougerie suggests, this poster was meant to announce the seizure of power by the delegation of the 20 Arrondissements (cf. "Le Mouvement Social", No. 37, Oct-Dec. 1961, p. 25) this text has even more value. It would establish it even more strongly within a perspective of action.

[25] Robespierre: *Sur le Gouvernement Représentatif*, selected texts (Editions Sociales, Vol. II, p. 147).

[26] *Les Sans Culottes Parisiens en l'An II*, (Librairie Chavreuil).

[27] K. Marx: *The Civil War in France.*

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the popular masses took adminstrative and political management into their own hands as this appeared to be the best solution possible.

Giving evidence before the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the conduct of the Government of National Defence, General Trochu was able to get out of difficulties merely by telling the truth: that is to say, that the armament, equipment and pay of the National Guard, the distribution of relief, the feeding of a population of hundreds of thousands, could only have been dealt with by the town halls, but that all these extra tasks would have overwhelmed a single mayor and a handful of assistants in each arrondissement. Commenting on this statement, the Comte de Pessegier then stressed that most of the mayors were surrounded by revolutionary committees including men who were later to play an important role in the Commune.[28]

This situation was to be repeated later, in 1917, in Tsarist Russia which also cracked under the weight of war: the Soviets were created to fulfil the functions deserted by the central Government and its administration. This application of living democracy, at the base, favoured revolutionary development, and a new type of State was born "which was not invented by the Russians but engendered by the Revolution, and without it the Revolution could not have triumphed".[29]

Such is the dialectic of revolutionary development: popular democracy established under the pressure of daily necessity bringing about the full flowering of the revolution. And this, in its turn, extends the democratic foundations of the new State.

Called by the general crisis, as well as by the deficiencies at the pinnacle of power, into independent political activity, the masses are thus forced into an accentuation of their activity. This is a time when history wears seven league boots, when changes take place in a few weeks that would in "normal" times have needed years, for "the real education of the masses can never be separated from the independent, political and particularly from the revolutionary struggle of the masses themselves. Only action educates the exploited class, only action discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizons, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will".[30]

IV. "The Republic is possible only if it is undisguisedly a social republic"[31]

The organs of the Commune defined their objectives as they proceeded; failing to understand this, certain historians have pulled a wry face and insisted on the fact that the social programme of the Communards remained fragmentary and indefinite.

In an article of 1877 which appeared in *Zukunft*, Jules Guesde displayed more lucidity than they have. After having noted that the Communalist movement in the provinces limited itself to the defence of a political programme, including the establishment of a democratic republic and local autonomy, he observed that, in the large towns where the working-class element prevailed, this conquest of public power would have quickly led to an economic revolution. This moreover is the lesson of the Paris Commune. At every level, one can discern this accelerated consciousness. The organisations in which the popular forces were then concentrated existed before March 18th, but their role was expanded, their objectives were enriched under the impulse of events.

Under the Impulse of Events

This was the case with the Central Committee of the National Guard, at first responsible for the general interests of the combatants in the siege, then later becoming the political centre and revolutionary conscience of the citizens in arms, a decision-making centre able, because of the military powers it possessed to transform quickly political analysis into action. The battalions of the National Guard, for their part, with their elected officers, their family councils which took on an important social role, became cells at the base of a new type of army. This people in arms appeared so dangerous to the bourgeoisie that one of the first precautions it took after its victory was to "suppress the 'intelligent bayonets' and the bodies in which the principle of election for leaders vitiates authority".[32]

The trades councils also found new impetus in the events of March 18th. They were reinvigorated and they multiplied in a newly propitious climate. They worked in collaboration with the Commission for Labour and Trade, appointed by the General Council of the Commune. The aspirations and the needs of the workers became better known, better expressed, their demands were studied in their general political context: thus we see the council for armament repair workshops accept within its rules discussion of the possibility of including the principle of working overtime "in the interest of the defence of the Commune".[33]

It was these trades councils which were made responsible by the Commune for drawing up the

[28] *Inquiry*, op. cit. p. 128.
[29] Lenin: *First Congress of Russian Soviets.*
[30] Lenin: *Report on the Revolution of 1905.*
[31] K. Marx: *The Civil War in France*, First Draft.
[32] M. Delpit in the Inquiry into the Insurrection of March 18th.
[33] Bruhat, Tersen, Dautry: *La Commune de 1871* (Editions Sociales, p. 153).

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list of abandoned workshops that were to be put under the management of workers' co-operatives. And it was these councils which proposed a number of the decrees concerning workers' conditions.

A document published by the Official Journal of the Commune illustrates very well this fundamental understanding between the leaders of the Commune and the organised workers. On May 13th 1871, following the decree abolishing night work in the bakeries, this call was issued:

> "When we have won a victory for justice and right, it is our duty to turn out in force and demonstrate our satisfaction. To this end, all bakery workers will, on Monday May 18th, at 4 o'clock in the evening (sic), assemble at the Hotel de Ville to express our gratitude to the Commune and assure it of our loyalty. For the Guild, E. Henry".

Popular Power

This collaboration between the General Council of the Commune and the popular organisations was not limited to exchanges with the trades councils: a wide variety of clubs, societies and associations also participated by their suggestions in political decisions. Thus, the "New Education" society played a large part in the preparation of educational reform, just as the clubs worked out numerous proposals, from the creation of municipal butchers' shops to legislation on rents, from the criticising of military operations to suggesting ways of preventing the "big fish" running away.

Lastly, as individuals, through the Press—which was developing into a constant popular tribune by its frequent publication of readers' letters—citizens could express their opinions and suggest this or that measure of common interest. Even the Official Journal of the Commune selected the most interesting texts for reproduction. Such as it did on May 15th 1871 with a lucid letter from someone called Bellivier which he had written to the *Vengeur* on the subject of the defences in the Bois de Boulogne.

True, relations between the popular power and the masses were not always idyllic. The support given to the men in the Hotel de Ville was at the same time a critical support: "We are no more disposed to suffer the yoke of our equals of yesterday than that of our tyrants", declared *Le Prolétaire*, newspaper of the clubs of the Eleventh Arrodissement, on May 19th 1871.

"Why is the Commune so spineless?" asked a correspondent from Pére Duchêne district. In this way there came about—in the happy phrase of Claude Perrot—"a double-sided relationship, for it was the result both of a strong loyalty and a constantly alert critical spirit".[34] The elected representatives of the General Council, including workers and well-known representatives of the working class, were subjected to a strict control of their mandates by reason of the organisation of communalist power. For this was not "a parliamentary organisation, but an active body, executive and legislative at the same time".[35] "We must, each time that we make a decree, indicate who will be the delegate responsible for the execution of the decree", declared Varlin in this spirit to the General Council of April 2nd 1871.[36]

From that moment, as Lenin wrote in *The State and Revolution*,

> "freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents. Henceforth, the real work of the State is no longer done in the corridors while they are content to gossip in Parliament."

Certainly, this open and active democracy proves to be exacting for the elected representatives, who are liable to recall at any time and subject to the control of their electors, but only this can ensure the alliance of the working class and its partners, this front of non-exploiting classes against an exploiting minority which has been finally displaced from power, this dictatorship of the majority over the minority.

For it was the Paris Commune which first taught us—later came the October Revolution and other experiences of the same significance—that the working class could not seize control of the State on its own, whereas this class alone could carry its liberating task to completion, to the benefit of "all the classes of society which do not live on the work of others".[37] There is no doubt that the democratic form of popular power established in 1871 in Paris helped the petty and middle bourgeoisie to rally to the workers' revolution. "It forms with the workers", observed Marx in the First Draft of *The Civil War*, "the bulk of the National Guard, it sits with them in the Commune, it mediates for them in the Union Républicaine".

There was, in fact, so little contradiction between the fundamental interests of the proletariat and those of the middle classes—already in this period threatened by the evolution of capitalism—that the *first* important measures of the Commune were to benefit the latter. Finally, Martial Delpit, the rapporteur of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into March 18th, clearly perceived the effect of the popular and democratic organisation

[34] Tersen, Bruhat, Dautry: *La Commune de 1871* (Editions Sociales, p. 166).

[35] K. Marx: *The Civil War in France*.

[36] *Journal Official de la Commune*, April 23rd, p. 358.

[37] K. Marx: *The Civil War in France*, First Draft.

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of the Commune when he depicted it as "a collective being concentrating all social forces, owning the land and industry, and exploiting both by distributing jobs and profits among its adepts".[38]

If we take the term *adepts* to mean the broad popular strata of society gathered round the working class, then the definition is not such a bad one. . . .

V. "The further Socialist democracy is developed, the greater will be the political and ideological role of the Communist Party"[39]

It is nevertheless far from our purpose to paint a rosy picture of a reality which was in fact much harsher and much more complex than this exposition of the *main lines of force* of the Commune may suggest. Marx, in extolling the example of the Communards, did not fail to observe that "the working class did not expect miracles from the Commune" and that, in order to achieve its emancipation, "it will have to go through long struggles, through a whole series of historical processes which will completely transform circumstances and men".

The Commune itself constituted an important stage in these processes which are capable of bringing lasting transformations in circumstances and men. It did not give birth to a *myth* as many historians have claimed, and for our part we reject this very ambiguous term. An event full of significance, arising in a period of transition at the moment when the bourgeoisie was losing its halo as the ruling class and the proletariat was asserting itself as the class of the future, the Commune was an inextricable blend of the new and the old.

It was one of those privileged movements, one of those revolutionary crises in the course of which the bold outline of a historical change becomes clearly visible, although all the means may not yet exist to exploit all the possibilities the situation has created.

Some Weaknesses

Subsequently, in the popular consciousness, a rather idealised picture of the Commune has been built up in an inevitably schematic way. Is it *mythical* because it retains only the promises for the future which lay concealed within the event? The important thing is that the broadest masses should still be able to appreciate the significance of March 18th, that they should have a true picture of the historical reality of the Commune, "glorious harbinger of a new society".

Of course, a conscious proletariat cannot be satisfied with this initial picture, which is indispensable but inadequate. It must deepen its analysis of the final defeat. That is why it is necessary to bring out all the weaknesses of the working-class movement at that time. Marxists are, whatever their detractors may say, engaged in this task. As an example I need only take the little book of Tristan Rémy, *La Commune à Montmartre*, a kaleidoscopic chronicle of the last days of working-class power in that district of Paris.

The understanding the author has for the combatants of 1871 does not lead him into reverently concealing their weaknesses: "*Above all, they were men*", he writes, "*not heroes of legend or mythology*". The ranks of the Communards had their generous measure of no-goods, freaks, and adventurers of every stamp, while a grave lack of discipline and control weakened the battalions of the National Guard, while the General Council of the Commune lost opportunities to act effectively against Versailles, and many of the proposals and ideas which sprang from the popular organisations were not exploited.

Lack of an Organising Centre

Everything happened as though the new power had found the means of liberating the latent energy and initiatives of the masses without being able to utilise this formidable force. And that is certainly one of the essential weaknesses of the enterprise: there was no organising element at the centre of this flood of ideas, there was no disciplined advance guard in the working class capable of concentrating and guiding the forces which were available for the struggle. But the adherents of the International followed their own impulses, they acted in scattered order, with no co-ordination, just as the inspiration took them. This mistake, observes Jean Bruhat,[40] was perceived by the Paris Federal Council which, on May 3rd sought to remedy it by setting up a commission responsible for presenting the proposals of the International for discussion and agreement by the Commune.

It was a belated attempt at organisation which the beginning of Bloody Week quickly thwarted. Here we touch on one of the most important lessons drawn from the experience of the Communards by the masters of scientific Socialism. To the necessity of radically transforming the apparatus of the bourgeois State, and of promoting an authentic democracy among the masses, there was now added the necessity of developing the activity of a revolutionary party whose political and ideological role was indispensable and without which,

[38] *Inquiry into March 18th*, op. cit., p. 26.

[39] French Communist Party's Champigny Manifesto, December 5th-6th 1968. Point Nine ("Socialist democracy and the defence of Socialism").

[40] *op. cit.*

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in any case, the working class would not be able to fulfil its historic task.

A hundred years after the Commune, the experience accumulated by the working-class movement in the course of this glorious episode is still valid. In new conditions, and based on a deep analysis of the evolution of capitalism in circumstances which encourage the widest unity of non-monopolist sections of society around the working class, the activity of the French Communist Party is still based on the lesson of the Commune.

Taking from Lenin the idea that "living, creative Socialism is the work of the popular masses themselves", the Party's Champigny Manifesto states the objective of encouraging in the Socialist France of tomorrow, as in the time of the Commune, "the widest democracy for the workers, and for the whole people, so that they may participate in the direction and management of public affairs n every domain and at every level". At the same time, this document underlines the determining role "of an intense activity by the Communist Party among the masses, to guide their action and lead the struggle against bourgeois ideology, to win them over ever more fully to the ideas of Socialism, to the task of building Socialist society and to the rejection of reactionary intrigue".

On September 4th 1871, the Vicomte de Meaux, rapporteur on the Communalist movements in the provinces, declared before the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry: "The terrible struggle which has taken place in Paris is not over. It has merely moved its ground and changed in appearance. Other methods of combat are required to pursue it".[41]

We should listen to the enemy; sometimes, in self-defence, he gives useful information and valuable advice. (*Translated by Peter Avis*)

[41] *Inquiry*, op. cit., p. 63.

16 - 28 Mai 1871 - 2 heures - Prise de la dernière barricade
située à l'angle des rues de Tourtille et Rampomeau malgré la défense désespérée des insurgés
(D'après croquis original de Bobida)

May 28th, 1871—Capture of the last barricade by the Versailles troops

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Britain and the Paris Commune

A. L. Morton

In order to understand the British reactions to the Commune it is necessary to have some picture of the situation of the working-class movement at that date. There was a substantial and growing trade union movement, virtually confined to the skilled craftsmen who constituted a labour aristocracy. Its leaders, moreover, were reformist and their aims limited: even those who were prepared to work with Marx in the International Working Men's Association were far from sharing or even understanding his outlook.

There was no independent political party or movement of the workers, though a number of former Chartists and other individuals and groups would have liked to build one. Some of these were members of, or worked with, the IWMA. Finally, there was a powerful Radical movement, bourgeois in character but attracting many of the most politically active workers. This movement had a Republican wing, whose most prominent figure was Bradlaugh. George Odger, a trade union leader who had been active on the General Council of the IWMA, and was still a member though differing increasingly from its policies, was by 1870 associated with Bradlaugh's republican campaign.

Fall of the Empire

Republicanism in Britain was greatly stimulated by the fall of Napoleon in September 1870. Previously, opinion had been divided, with perhaps the majority inclined to sympathy with Prussia. Now it was recognised that the war had changed its character and the defence of the new-born French Republic united for a time all progressive forces. Some sections demanded armed military intervention by Britain on the side of France, others merely that the British Government should recognise the new Republic, and, after a protracted debate, the General Council of the International took this view. Meanwhile a vigorous campaign went on, with large rallies and meetings in Hyde Park, Trafalgar Square and other places in London and the provinces.

Yet quite early ominous differences appeared. Bradlaugh, Odger and their supporters were uncritical and even adulatory in their attitude to Thiers, Favre and the group of reactionaries who dominated the Government at Orléans. In its *Address on the Franco-Prussian War*, written by Marx and issued on September 9th, the General Council voiced its well-founded misgivings:

> We hail the advent of the Republic in France, but at the same time we labour under misgivings which we hope will prove groundless. . . . It is in the hands of a Provisional Government composed partly of notorious Orléanists, partly middle-class Republicans, upon some of whom the insurrection of June, 1848 has left its indelible stigma. . . . Some of their first acts go far to show that they have inherited from the Empire, not only ruins, but also its dread of the working class.

In the debates of the General Council, where Odger still had his supporters, Marx was considerably more outspoken.

With the formation of the Commune the consequences of these divergences became tragically apparent and led in the end to a division that went a long way to prevent any effective actions of solidarity. There was, nevertheless, an immediate wave of sympathy. In a number of cases members of the IWMA attending Republican meetings were able to secure their support for the Commune. A demonstration in Hyde Park was called for April 16th by an organisation known as the International Democratic Association, whose relations with the IWMA had not always been happy. Nevertheless its co-operation was invited and, in spite of some differences of opinion, it was decided to appoint two members of the General Council, Weston and Murray, to speak on its behalf.

This demonstration was a considerable success—estimates of the number present running as high as 30,000—and a resolution was adopted declaring:

> We salute you in the name of the universal Republic. . . . We, the people of London, assured that you are fighting for the liberty and freedom of the whole human race, stretch out to you the hand of friendship and brotherhood. . . . Our one regret is that our political education on this side of the Channel is not yet sufficiently complete to lead us to follow your noble example.[1]

This resolution was printed in the Paris *Official Journal* of the Commune on April 20th.

[1] Retranslated from Bruhat, Dautry and Tersen, *La Commune de 1871*, p. 327.

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Odger and Lucraft

The defeat of the Commune and the publication of *The Civil War in France* as an official document of the General Council precipitated a new situation. It had been the rule for the names of all members of the Council to be appended to all its statements. This rule had never been questioned at any time. On this occasion, however, Applegarth, perhaps the most influential of its trade union members, asked to have his name omitted, and this was done. His action seems to have been due to timidity and perhaps ill health rather than to downright opposition, since Applegarth remained a member till the Council was wound up after the Hague Congress. The case of two others—Odger, who objected especially to the personal attack on Favre, and Lucraft—was somewhat different. Neither took the trouble to be present at the Council meeting of May 30th, where the manifesto was to be read and discussed. Lucraft, however, had been at the meeting of the previous week, where he had declared:

> He had been ill, and that was the reason he hadn't attended the Council but his sympathies had been with it the whole time and with the Commune. If the trades i.e. the Trade Unions did not take up this question, they never could be relied on.[2]

His professed indignation at the inclusion of his name seems, in face of this, quite inexcusable, still more his statement at the meeting of June 20th that "The International had defended ruffians who had done deeds that he abhorred".[3] At the same time he admitted that he had not actually read the document: "he had gathered impressions from the newspapers". Odger, according to John Hales, Secretary of the General Council, "was waited upon personally and informed that the Council was about to issue an address, and was asked if he objected to his name appearing in connection with it, and he said "No".[4] Like Lucraft he attended this meeting on June 20th, complained of the use of his name and resigned.

While these defections were an undoubted blow, the common view that support for the Commune antagonised the British organised workers and so gravely weakened the IWMA is certainly incorrect. No other members objected or resigned. Not a single affiliated trade union withdrew over this issue. Further, the meetings of the General Council after the Commune were, on the average, twice as well attended as previously and its work went on at least as vigorously as before for another year. The decline that set in during 1872 had, I think, quite other causes.

Press Hostility

All the same, the universal barrage of press hostility was not without its effect. Even those journals which had been at times semi-official organs of the International were affected. The *Beehive*, for example, applauded the defection of Odger and Lucraft, and, while it published letters and articles favourable to the Commune, also published attacks upon it. The *Eastern Post* was similarly "impartial". The only journals which seem to have supported the Commune without reservations were *Reynolds's* and the Radical *Examiner* whose editor Fox-Bourne was at this time in close touch with Marx. The great national newspapers, both Liberal and Tory, were all virulently hostile, even though they could not ignore the atrocities committed by the Versailles troops and Government. Thus, *The Times* had to write:

> The laws of war! They are mild and Christian compared with the inhuman laws of revenge under which the Versailles troops have been shooting, bayonetting, ripping up prisoners, women and children during the last six days. So far as we can recollect there has been nothing like it in history.[5]

And, more characteristically, in its "impartial" vein:

> Human nature shrinks in horror from the deeds that have been done in Paris. The crimes of the Insurgents have surpassed the most gloomy forebodings of what would be accomplished under the Red Flag. . . . But it seems as if we were destined to forget the work of these maddened savages in the spectacle of the vengeance wreaked upon them. The wholesale executions inflicted by the Versailles soldiery, the triumph, the glee, the ribaldry of the "Party of Order", sicken the soul.[6]

It was typical of the great British press that the recognition of these crimes did not prevent it from continuing to blackguard their victims. On the left, bourgeois republicans like Bradlaugh and Holyoake, and Shipton of the London Trades Council, continued to attack both the Commune and the International for defending it.

There can be little doubt that this hostile barrage, following years of opportunism and class-collaboration within the working-class movement, had its adverse affect. There is little evidence for working-class hostility to the Commune, but there was hesitation and apathy. As early as May 23rd Hales was saying:

> so much misrepresentation had been promulgated by the English that it would not be wise to call

[2] *Documents of the First International*, Vol. IV, p. 202.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 217.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 425.

[5] 29/5/1871.

[6] 31/5/1871.

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> upon the trades. The workmen were not so decided in their opinions as they ought to be.[7]

And on August 8th, Engels, speaking with some bitterness of the apathy of the workers, said:

> He thought the working class of England had behaved in a disgraceful manner: though the men of Paris had risked their lives, the working men of England had made no effort either to sympathise with them or to assist them. There was no political life in them; he would propose "That an appeal be made to the workmen of England on behalf of the refugees"; if they would not do anything, let their conduct be known.[8]

By this time a very large number of Communard refugees were in London, many entirely destitute, and the General Council had undertaken responsibility for their welfare. Some money had already been collected, and, at Engels' suggestion, an appeal for a Relief Fund was made. No figures were ever given as to its result, but all the signs are that it was pitifully small, and that such money as was collected came mainly from middle-class sympathisers and humanitarians. There is certainly no record of any trade union having made a donation —a striking contrast to the sum of over £600 which was raised in the same period for the Antwerp cigar makers then on strike.

A question that may be asked but not as yet answered is, what, if any, was the British participation in the Commune itself? William Morris, in his socialist epic *The Pilgrims of Hope*, has his heroes go to join the fighting in Paris, as does the hero of Mrs. Lynn Linton's novel *The True History of Joshua Davidson*, published in 1872. These are fictions, but William Gibson, a Methodist minister in Paris, who remained there throughout the Commune, speaks of "a fair sprinkling" of "Englishmen of the ultra Red Republican party", and of "many" Englishmen of "Red Republican principles" involved in the fighting.[9] On the other hand I have yet to find any specific reference to any particular British man or woman involved. "Many" is clearly an exaggeration, but were there some? Information on this point would be of great value.

Two other matters perhaps deserve some attention: the middle-class and literary reactions and the longer-term influence of the Commune in the socialist and labour movement.

The Positivists and John Ruskin

The only bourgeois group which consistently supported the Commune were the Positivists—Frederic Harrison, Dr. Harry Bridges, and, most conspicuously, Professor Beesly, who had presided at the inaugural meeting of the International and had come out courageously in defence of trade unionism at the time of the so-called "Sheffield Outrages". As early as March 25th he had defended the Commune in an outspoken article in the *Beehive* and never wavered in his attitude thereafter. In August 1871 Frederic Harrison published a defence of the Commune in the *Fortnightly Review*, while Bridges declared in the *Beehive* that it was Thiers and not the Communards who was responsible for the death of the Archbishop of Paris and other hostages shot during the last days of the Commune, an episode about which a great agitation was then being whipped up.

An unexpected ally was Robert Reid, formerly Paris correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, whose experiences had made him sympathetic to the Commune and who had been disgusted at its dishonest treatment in the British press. A number of his own reports to the *Telegraph* had been suppressed as too favourable to the Commune. On his return to England he was in touch with Marx and Engels and made arrangements with the General Council to tour the country giving lectures on the Commune and selling copies of *The Civil War in France*.

The most remarkable and extraordinary tribute to the Commune came from one of the greatest English writers of the century, John Ruskin. In January 1871, while the siege of Paris was still going on, he had begun to publish *Fors Clavigera*, a series of monthly "Letters to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain". In May he referred to the Commune, sympathetically, but to some extent affected by reports of Communard atrocities which he could not then have known to be untrue. In June he returned to the theme with a passage which, if confused, is at bottom similar to Marx's assessment of the Commune as opening "a new phase" in the struggle of the workers against capitalism and "a new point of departure of world historic importance".

> The first reason for all wars, Ruskin wrote, and the necessity of national defences, is that the majority of persons, high and low, in all European nations, are thieves, and, in their hearts, greedy of their neighbours' goods, lands and fame. . . . And the guilty thieves of Europe, the real source of all deadly war in it, are the Capitalists—that is to say, people who live by percentages on the labour of others; instead of by fair wages for their own. The *Real* war in Europe, of which this fighting in Paris is the Inauguration, is between these and the workmen, such as they have made him. They kept him poor, ignorant, and sinful, that they might, without his knowledge, gather for themselves the produce of his toil. At last the fact of this

[7] *Documents*, Vol. IV, p. 203.
[8] *Ibid.* p. 256.
[9] *Paris During the Commune*, pp. 101, 120.

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dawns upon him; and such as they have made him he meets them, and *will* meet.[10]

In July he referred sardonically to the success of a 5 per cent loan raised by the Thiers Government, which, he said, would be used to hold down the people, and in a passage of noble generosity and great power, linked the Commune with the whole heroic tradition of French history:

> Ouvrier and petroleuse; they are gone their way—to their death. But for these . . . great Charles shall rouse his Roland, and bid him put a ghostly trump to lip and breathe a point of war; and the helmed Pucelle shall answer with a woodnote of Domremy; yes, and for these the holy Louis they mocked, like his master, shall raise his holy hands and pray God's peace.
>
> "Not as the world giveth". Everlasting shame only, and unrest, are the world's gifts. These Swine of the 5 per cent shall share them duly.[11]

Inevitably we are reminded of Marx with his "monstrous gnome" and his "storming heaven".

If understanding of the significance of the Commune was slow in growing in Britain, it was never really forgotten. Three editions of *The Civil War*, apparently some 4,000 copies in all, were printed in 1871 and cannot have been without effect. The Nottingham Branch of the IWMA published as a pamphlet in 1872 *Letters on the Commune. The Law of Revolution; or the Logical Development of Human Society*, and written by its secretary, Thomas Smith. Originally appearing as a series of letters to the *Nottingham Daily Express* at various dates from March 5th to July 13th, 1871, this pamphlet, utilising the defence of the Commune is a starting point, goes on to develop a viewpoint of history that clearly owes a good deal to the ideas of Marx.

On the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Commune, the International, with the Refugees and the "Democrats of London" planned a meeting in St. George's Hall, Langham Place, with an imposing list of French and English speakers. This was prevented at the last minute when the proprietors of the Hall, responding perhaps to outside pressure, cancelled the booking, but an emergency meeting was held elsewhere.

In 1879 we find Joseph Lane, later to be an active member of the Socialist League, working in the Marylebone Radical Association where he was successful in getting a number of Radical Clubs to sign an "Address to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Commune".

Another Socialist Leaguer, Belfort Bax, describes in his *Reminiscences* the way in which, as a boy, he had been impressed by the Commune, which "had a strong influence upon the whole course of my thoughts on things social and political and led ultimately to my being a convinced socialist".[12]

[10] *Fors*. Vol. I. pp. 139-141.

[11] *Ibid*. p. 152.

The Commune and the Socialist Revival

With the revival of Socialism and the growing influence of Marxism in the 1880s, the influence of the Commune grew remarkably. A translation of Lissagaray's *History* by Eleanor Marx appeared in 1886. But, even before this, regular commemoration meetings were being held. William Morris, in a letter, describes the very first demonstration in which he took part, marching to Highgate Cemetery in March 1884, a year after the death of Marx:

> at the tail of various banners and a very bad band to do honour to the memory of Marx *and* the Commune: the thing didn't look as absurd as it sounds, as we were a tidy number, I should think more than a thousand in the procession, and onlookers to the amount, when we got to the end, of some 2 or 3 thousand more.[13]

Morris, indeed, is particularly associated with the fight to popularise the Commune tradition in Britain. When he called himself a Communist, as he commonly did, he meant primarily one who honoured the Commune and tried to continue its work. In his great socialist poem *The Pilgrims of Hope*, his first major contribution to *Commonweal*, he treated the Commune, as Marx did before him and Lenin after, as the forerunner of the revolution which would ultimately liberate the whole human race. The section dealing with the Commune is called, significantly, *A Glimpse of the Coming Day*, Morris, speaking through his hero in Paris, saw that the Commune gave sense and meaning to his life work:

> And that day at last of all days I knew what life was worth;
> For I saw what few have beheld, a folk with all hearts gay.
> Then at last I knew indeed that our word of the coming day,
> That so oft in grief and in sorrow I had preached, and scarcely knew
> If it was but despair of the present or hope of the day that was due—
> I say that I saw it now, real, solid and at hand.[14]

In the pamphlet *A Short Account of the Commune of Paris*, which he wrote in collaboration with Belfort Bax in 1886, he described it as "a torch lighting us on our way towards the complete emancipation of labour". This pamphlet, though

[12] *Reminiscences and Reflections*, p. 32.

[13] *Letters*, ed. Philip Henderson, p. 195.

[14] A few lines earlier Morris calls Thiers "the vile dwarf", an obvious paraphrase of Marx and evidence that he was familiar with *The Cold War*.

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short, was for a long time virtually the only serious account of the Commune available in English apart from Lissagaray's *History*. Morris was also among the speakers at at least four of the annual commemoration meetings—in 1885, 1887, 1888 and 1890. It is to be regretted that none of his speeches on these occasions has been preserved.

These commemoration meetings for long served as one of the few focal points of unity in a sadly fragmented socialist movement. At them members : the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, and, indeed, a remarkably wide range of speakers from all sections of the movement, came together, perhaps for the only time in the year. Before the heroic memory of the Commune differences for once came to seem petty and feuds could be forgotten. In the broadest sense the Commune became the touchstone for the whole socialist movement. The true Socialist was a man who honoured it and sought to follow its example. This indeed was to remain the case in Britain till the October Revolution provided us with a new standard of judgement, which indeed enlarged, but in no sense contradicted, the old.

Thomas Smith: A Working Class Defender of the Commune

Peter Wyncoll

"The English people cannot be made to understand how much the Communists have suffered at the hands of their hated tyrants. And can we wonder? Led astray by the misstatements made by our hireling press, they look upon the fallen patriots misfortunes without any feeling of compassion, on his fate without the slightest emotion of pity. They are so poisoned by the tales told continually by the vile penny-a-liners whose mission seems to be to misrepresent everything which is distasteful to the parties in power, that they look upon the unfortunate Parisians with horror as being simply scoundrels and criminals of the deepest dye".[1]

This quotation taken from the official organ of the British Section of the International Working Men's Association, was certainly true of the great majority of the English people. But at the same time there is ample evidence that the readership of the *International Herald* and the more advanced sections of the English proletariat were deeply stirred by the events in Paris during 1871. During 1872 and 1873 the pages of the *Herald* were filled with articles, letters, and poems inspired by the Commune and the plight of the Communards. Collections were taken up for the refugees and it was through these that Thomas Smith, a Nottingham workingman came first to write to Karl Marx, then to found the Nottingham Section of the First International, and shortly afterwards to publish a remarkable defence of the Commune.

Worker and Republican

Very little is known of Thomas Smith. That he was a workingman is certain for in one of his letters to Marx he wrote that all the Nottingham contributors to the refugee fund were like himself ordinary workingmen. Judging from the house in which he lived which still stands, Smith was probably an artisan in one of the needle trades for which the town was famous. That he was a keen trade unionist is clear. In the period just prior to the Commune he played a leading part in the towns' nine-hour movement, and during the great agricultural lock-out he was treasurer of the distress fund organised in Nottingham in favour of the members of Joseph Arch's union.

Like many other English trade unionists during the 1870's Smith was it seems a temperance advocate. His friend and colleague Samual Parker the Secretary of the Nottingham Labour Protection League, writing to the Secretary of the British Federal

[1] *International Herald*, October 5th, 1872.

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Council of the International lamented, "Citizen Smith is a worthy man, and earnest but him being a total abstainer he can't go where I do. . . ."[2] That Smith was a keen republican is also clear. He was elected national treasurer of the short lived Republican Brotherhood, and often spoke on the subject at a variety of Labour Movement meetings in and around Nottingham.

From these scant details it is obvious that Thomas Smith belonged to the most advanced and progressive section of the English working class movement. As well as being in the forefront of both political and industrial activity in the Nottingham district, Smith was also a theorist. His pamphlet *Letters On The Commune* and the four or five articles printed in the Herald which make up his published work reveal a powerful and original mind. His political thinking was clear and logical, and his writing contains a view of history and the forces which govern it which for a man of his time and class is quite remarkable.

Embryonic Marxist

Like Marx, Smith saw clearly that the great engine force of history was provided by great movements within society rather than by the action of individuals. Although never clearly citing economic forces as being the key to historical change he was certainly an embryonic Marxist. His *Letters On The Commune* was also titled *The Law Of The Revolution* or the *Logical Development Of Human Society* and it is clear that basing his theory on a knowledge of Ancient and Medieval history Smith sharply perceived the revolutionary forces at work within society.

Writing in the *Herald* on Universal Suffrage for instance Smith took issue with John Stuart Mill whom he called the "Professor of Political Economy and Chaos" thus:

> "though he has written to show that production and distribution of wealth are subject to immutable laws, and that the growth of population obeys irresistible laws, though they are but parts of human society, yet the growth of society as a whole he denies is subject to any law of logical development; in fact he seems to think that all creation, from a grain of sand to the stars and constellations, are subject to the reign of law—all except human society, it alone of all existence is chaotic . . . history, as it has been written, is simply the record of this and that mans doings, King, General, or what not, with an account of their smallest sayings, doings, and surroundings, as if they were the all important facts, and apparently without any idea that society was obeying any law of growth . . . this point of view, from which all history has been written, that persons are all important and principles nothing, is the right one, if Mr. John Stuart Mill's assertion is correct, that society is not subject to any law of growth; but if society, like all the rest of creation, is the subject of law, which it is forced to obey, then the law of growth and the principles it successively develops in the course of that growth, are all important facts of history to be ever kept in view, as guides by which the importance and course of events may be truly measured. . . ." Later in the same article Smith makes it clear that he saw these revolutionary principles as being absolutely irresistible, "to its imperious demands all had to bend, Victor and Vanquished, Monarchy and Republic, Revolution and Coup d'Etat found themselves paralysed when opposing and resistless when obeying this Law of the Revolution; and so it will be in the future, for the law of the development of human society is as imperative in commanding obedience, as Nature's other laws, and will not be defied, and for this all good men will rejoice, as it gives assurance that the future of humanity will be ever brighter and brighter."[3]

Nottingham Internationalists

All of Smith's published writing was influenced either by the actual events of the Paris Commune, or by a tremendous admiration for the French people, and knowledge of their history. To him the French were an "ever brave and logical people".[4] Paris he called, "the advanced guard of human enfranchisement"[5] or the "Martyr City of Liberty".[6] Many of his political friends were refugees of the Commune. As a leading centre of the hosiery trade Nottingham had attracted a number of refugee defenders of the Commune to work in the lace and clothing industries, and these emigrant Frenchmen, had quickly formed their own branch of the International in the town.

This French section of the International met weekly in the Black Bull public house. It seems to have been well organised under its Secretary Charles Hazard, and as late as 1873 was still accepting into membership Commune refugees. At its meeting on March 29th 1873 the French section accepted into membership Etienne Masson a recently arrived refugee, and in May of the same year Henri Bardout a refugee of the Commune and a member of the International since 1868 was unanimously elected a member of the Section. Communards like Hazard, Masson, Bardout must often have attended joint meetings with their English comrades, and there is no doubt that their presence in Nottingham helped to shape many of Thomas Smith's ideas. Certainly there existed

[2] Parker to Vickery, May 18th, 1873, IISH.

[3] *International Herald*, March 1st, 1873.

[4] *International Herald*, January 4th, 1873.

[5] *International Herald*, March 1st, 1873.

[6] *Letters on the Commune*, page 7.

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a strong sense of solidarity between Nottingham Internationalists like Smith, Parker, and Tyler and the refugees of the Commune working in the town. Smith himself had acted as collector for a Commune refugee fund during 1871 and had sent Marx various amounts for the Paris Commune Refugee Committee.

Two years later one of the exiled Communards died in the nearby town of Ilkeston, and the French and English Internationalists of Nottingham combined to make his funeral a moving demonstration of solidarity. Writing to the British Federal Council about the funeral Hazard wrote, "Last Saturday our Section and the Labour Protection League, went to the funeral of Citizen Gerband of Ilkeston, who was an energetic defender of our cause and and principles".[7] Gerband who had been employed as a needlemaker was buried in May 1873 and the *International Herald* reported:

> "we celebrated his funeral according to his and our way of thinking. The coffin was carried on two black wooden bars by four of our members, was covered with a pall upon which we had placed, unfurled our beautiful red flag . . . two addresses were pronounced over the grave one in French and the other in English by our friend Citizen Tyler of the English branch. Hundreds if not thousands assembled to see the funeral which was said to have been one of the most imposing and respectful ever witnessed in Ilkeston. Thus did the Internationalists of Nottingham prove that they understand the principle of solidarity even unto death".[8]

Aristocrats and Priests

Smith's presence at this Communist funeral was symbolic not only of his feeling of solidarity with the Commune, but its atheistic form underlined his view of the Church and Priesthood. Like nearly all of the progressive English proletariat Smith clearly identified the Church as a major weapon of the ruling class. Writing in May 1871 before the fall of the Commune he predicts, "If the Assembly conquers Paris, all liberty of speech and press will be gone, and France will fall back on the old system of repression, based on an ignorant peasantry and the priesthood . . ."[9] For Smith the priests had always played a reactionary role. Of the revolution of 1848 for instance he wrote, "The middle class, who had ruled under Louis Phillipe thought they should be able to make a middle class Republic, and use the peasantry and the priests against the workmen of the large towns. . . ."[10] Of the same events he later wrote, "The bourgeoisie, backed by the priests—for the priests are always on hand when the blood of the people is to be shed—blindly proceeded on a course of reaction.[11] Linking this analysis with the events which followed the Commune he wrote, "The priests, yes, always the priests, and royalists reactionaries may flatter themselves, in spite of past failures, that the murders and massacres, the slaughter of men women, and children, which they are now perpetrating will rid them of the new ideas; but ideas are beyond the reach of arguments such as they alone trust to—the argument of force".[12]

If Smith's perception was sharp enough for him to identify the priesthood as one great weapon of the forces of reaction, he was just as clearly able to define the other class enemies. For him the Church and the Aristocracy were "twins in crime"[13]; together they were responsible for putting down the principles for which "the men of the Commune so bravely fought, and for which they were so brutally and cold-bloodedly murdered by the arch-scoundrel Thiers, and the blood-hound representatives of priestcraft and aristocracy. . . ."[14] He saw too that the ruling classes were linked internationally. For him the progressive forces liberated by the French Revolution had been defeated by what he called the "International Association of the Criminal Classes"[15] and Smith's own participation in the International Workingmen's Association was obviously motivated by this realisation, and by his response to the great working class slogan "Workers of the World Unite".

The Commune

That Smith saw the Commune as the highest point yet reached in the struggle between the forces of progress and reaction is very plain. For him it represented:

> "plainly a struggle between the two great forces of society, progress, and repression, all are compelled to see what are the principles at stake. When the enemies of progress and repression were wading in the blood of the brave people of Paris, hoping to stamp out liberty by wholesale murder of the most devilish kind, some would-be philosopher, whose name I am not now certain of, triumphantly announced that, as he put it 'the smokey chimney had at last burnt itself out', that the republicans of France had at last got their quietus, and evidently hugged to himself the hope that the vampire classes who batten themselves on the oppression and misery of humanity, were going to have a long reign, in which they would quietly and undisturbed suck to their hearts content the blood of tortured

[7] *International Herald*, May 24th, 1873.
[8] *International Herald*, May 24th, 1873.
[9] *Letters On The Commune*, page 7.
[10] *Letters On The Commune*, page 6.
[11] *Letters On The Commune*, page 9.
[12] *Letters On The Commune*, page 9.
[13] *International Herald*, April 19th, 1873.
[14] *International Herald*, April 12th, 1873.
[15] *International Herald*, April 19th, 1873.

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> fellow-creatures, who helpless under their heel, would have to toil only to be robbed of the results of their labour to maintain in luxurious idleness the murderers of their brothers".[15]

That the hopes of the "vampire class" were false Smith was certain of, "Paris, though beaten and tortured is yet unbroken in spirit, and recuperated by the living forces of the nation, will soon again face her foes".[16] For him, "the childish hope that great principles vital to the progress of human society, could be destroyed by shedding torrents of blood, is by the stern logic of facts, shown to be futile. . . ."[17] The defeat of the Commune must have greatly saddened Smith, but despite the savage nature of its repression, and the barbarity of the reaction which followed it Smith strengthened by his view of history retained his essential optimism. In Nottingham too there was much to depress a man of Smith's sensitivity.

"A Remarkable Production"

In October 1873 the *Herald* carried a report that Nottingham's Corporation had been asked to consider covering in the Market Place to give work to many hundreds of skilled artisans, and labourers unemployed in the town. Smith's close friend Samuel Parker was victimised for his trade union activity, and the Nottingham French Section of the International split into opposing Marxist, and Anarchist factions. Despite these depressing factors however Smith retained his revolutionary vision. The advertisements for Smith's pamphlet on the Commune which appeared in the *Herald*, carry a quote from Marx after Smith had sent him a copy. Marx not a man given to fullsome praise described the pamphlet as "a remarkable production". Smith's work was certainly that. Living in a period in which capitalism was just getting into its stride and developing particularly vicious methods of exploitation Smith was able to develop a philosophy which enabled him to write;

> "liberty is not the result of the circumstances by which the nations were surrounded at their birth, but springs from the heart and brain of the people themselves in defiance of the utmost efforts of the privileged classes, we are justified in concluding that it will go on till all trace of privilege and caste are swept away, and that it will not disappear as before, under the blows of its enemies".[18]

Smith's support for the Commune was not isolated, and it was maintained. Sixteen years later the town's Socialists celebrated the Commune with a tea and ball in the Secular Hall. Speeches on the Commune were delivered in French and English. The Marseillaise was sung by Coutoux and Detre and amongst the decorations was a red banner inscribed "Vive la Commune". By this time Smith had either died or left the town but the town's continually developing working class movement owed much to his work and thought. His writing now a hundred years old remains a unique contribution to the development of a Marxist philosophy within the British Labour Movement.

(By Walter Crane)

[16] *Letters On The Commune*, page 11.
[17] *International Herald*, January 4th, 1873.
[18] *International Herald*, April 19th, 1873.

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The Communard Exiles in Britain

How They Came—How They Lived—What Became of Them

Stanley Hutchins

Britain was the foremost country to receive the exiles (excluding the places to which they were to serve their sentences) Switzerland being the second and Belgium the third.

Some went to Spain, a risky business, although Paul Lafargue having a Cuban passport spent some time there. America was another country to which many went voluntarily, as happened also after the 1848 events in Europe. Many travelled to more than one country.

Reasons for Exile

There were three major reasons for their exile.

1. They were fugitives from the military "justice" which dominated France after the fall of the Paris Commune.
2. Banishment, as part of their sentence, including loss of civil rights, and confiscation of property.
3. Disgust, due to the unsettled conditions in France, the terror to which every worker was likely to be subjected, and the tremendous damage done to property, both from Prussian guns and those of the contenders in the civil war.

Quite a number were sentenced by military courts years after they had left France. There were cases, one personally told to the present writer, of communards abroad who secretly visited their families in Paris and actually saw posters which gave names of the "wanted", including their own.

How they Came to Britain

Some escaped to Britain in disguise but many were so changed by their terrible experiences, both in the street fighting and during their journey, that a disguise was unnecessary. They were, in many cases, put on boats to England by the French authorities, many sleeping on the bare boards and plied with strong drink but little food by the former. Mostly they arrived on the Kent coast, but Sussex was a good second.

The British government made many mild protests to the French government against the despatch of, to them, unwanted communards to England, partly because of the appalling conditions in which they were conveyed and partly because of their destitute appearance. Many were looked after by the local authority, especially in Canterbury, Kent, on the first days of their arrival in this country.

Some, particularly prominent Communards and members of the International Working Mens Association, knew of addresses to which they could go. They were the fortunate ones. Two outstanding examples will be given later.

How They Lived

Most of those who came to England lived in London. At first the areas of Soho and Euston were popular but as their conditions improved, due sometimes to aid from British sympathisers, small "colonies" were to be found in Islington and Camden Town. Then followed further departures to Greenwich, Woolwich, Dulwich and Sydenham. Northampton, Middlesborough, Nottingham, Manchester and Glasgow were other places of settlement, if only for a temporary period.

For employment the artisans and craftsmen were much more fortunate. Many of the craftsmen were self-employed, the majority of whom had workshops of their own. Journalists suffered severely but, as we will later see, their output was not wasted forever. Many who were teachers gave French lessons privately, and others who knew the English language also earned a living in like manner.

One Employment Agency, specialising in placing English speaking exiles, was situated a few doors away from where Frederick Engels had lived

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many years before when in London, in Macclesfield Street.

A considerable number lived at first a communal life at 40 Rupert Street. On the first floor were a few mattresses—but straw palliasses was the only bedding for most of them at first. Living accommodation was short then, particularly for the "bloody foreigners" as some of the ignorant landlords and lodging-house keepers called them. Those who arrived during the late autumn and winter suffered terribly from the unaccustomed damp and dark nights of Victorian England. Of course, many of them travelled less than lightly.

Naturally the beverage was not what they were used to, and this added to their financial problems as coffee in England has always been dearer than tea.

Exiles in Soho

London's Soho was the almost automatic venue for the exiles. Fugitives from the repression following the French Revolution of 1848 and the Coup d'Etat of Louis Bonaparte in 1851 went there, and many were actually still there when the communards arrived. It was known as the "French quarter". No doubt, those who have read of Karl Marx's days of poverty in Dean Street, Soho, will recall the letter which Jenny, his wife, wrote in 1852.

> "The poor child's death (Franzisca's) took place in a period of bitterest poverty. I went to a French fugitive who lives near us and who had visited us shortly before. He received me with friendliness and sympathy and gave me two pounds and with that money the coffin in which my child could rest peacefully was paid for".

Well known as a member of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association, Auguste Serrailler, had a small shoe-repairing business at 34 Frith Street, where almost opposite, another exile Barjou owned a newspaper shop and he, of course, had many communards as customers. Nearby, in Bateman's Buildings, journalists worked to produce a news sheet and supply reports to foreign editors. At 59 Greek Street, Eugène Vermersch endeavoured to produce a journal akin to one "*Le Père Duchêne*" which he jointly edited during the Commune.

The first which he edited in London was called "Qui Vive", ran to 10 issues and lasted a little over two months. This was succeeded by the "Vermersch —Journal" which existed from 17th December, 1871 to 23rd March, 1872.

The descriptive work of Vermersch *Les Incendiaires*, which ran first as a contribution and was afterwards republished in pamphlet form, was written in Brussels and London in August-September 1871, and published in *Qui Vive* on November 26-27, 1871. He lapsed into attacks on his old comrades of the Commune and this led to bitter antagonism. On one occasion he was challenged by Edouard Vaillant, Minister for Education during the Commune, to publish corrections. There was a dispute which led to Vaillant being brought before a Police court and fined 30/- for "making a scene".

Apparently the experiences which he had undergone in Paris during the last week of the Commune, when it was being pressed back to defeat, had turned his brain. He kept a revolver in his desk in Greek Street as a weapon against real or imaginary enemies, pro- or anti-Commune. He then lived in the Prince of Wales Road, at 115, near the Mother Shipton public house, and died in 1878 at Colney Hatch Asylum. He was buried in the Great Northern Cemetery, London, in common ground.

Mrs. Le Roy, a woman combatant for the Commune, who lived near Barnsbury Station, assisted in the publication at 59 Greek Street. A near neighbour of hers was Gustave Worth a loyal fighter on the barricades.

"The Political French"

The "colony" of exiles soon spread to the north of Oxford Street, London and the area of Tottenham Court Road. For many years this part was known as that of the "political French". Now it is very, very cosmopolitan. In this broad area at No. 35 Huntley Street lived, at first, the most famous woman fighter, Louise Michel. During the fighting in Paris she was armed with a Remington rifle, not easily obtained in Europe in those days.

Louise Michel shared accomodation with Charlotte and her printer brother Achille Vauvelle. In the household were also a parrot and two four-legged pets. Wherever she lived she always had pets, quite often they were lame or blind. Louise came here to live only after leaving New Caledonia, the then French penal settlement, after the Amnesty of 1880. At her trial she demanded the same sentence as her male comrades and declared that the military tribunal would be cowards if they did not shoot her. Always, equal rights for her! She expected to be shot. A teacher by profession she taught voluntarily the unlettered of the communards, and the natives.

Some years later the people rebelled unsuccessfully against the French master and it can be pondered as to whether the work of Louise can be seen here.

She taught the women in exile in New Caledonia how to make clothes from the materials which became available from time to time. After Huntley Street came Charlotte Street for her. She lived at No. 59 before organising an International School at No. 17.

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Such progress did she make that agent-provocateurs and police spies went to work and finally forced her to close the premises. She lived successively at Dulwich and Sydenham before returning to France. Just before her departure she composed a poem to "The Women of England".

Returning to France she led a hunger march of unemployed workers and was sentenced for attacking bakers' shops.

For leading a commemoration gathering for the eighty second birthday of the veteran revolutionary Auguste Blanqui she also served a term of imprisonment.

Again she showed her principles by refusing release before the men who were sentenced with her.

In Charlotte Street

Also in Charlotte Street, at No. 67, lived Victor Richard, who had a grocery shop below his flat. This was a real boon to the communards because they so often had to ask for credit when employment was scarce. The present writer was able to obtain many facts on Richard and his revolutionary neighbours from a sympathetic woman who was both a customer and friend. He re-entered France in 1895 and died in 1912. As with Lissagaray, the historian of the Commune, he asked that he be cremated at Le Père Lachaise cemetery, where many martyrs of the Commune are buried, executed en bloc by the Versaillese soldiers.

To continue with Charlotte Street itself, we come to No. 36 where the wife of Albert Thiesz, chief of the postal service of the Commune, owned a laundry under the name of C. Levrey. After both had left for France, on being amnestied in 1880, the premises continued as a laundry until the recent betting laws came into being and then it was turned into a betting shop.

Thiesz had already been to London in 1862 at the age of 23 when he attended the International Exhibition. During exile he worked in Woolwich. An industrial worker, Marx was very proud of his progress with the study of "Capital". He and Frederick Engels were joint witnesses at the marriage of Charles Longuet and Jenny, eldest daughter of Karl Marx, in London on the October 9th, 1872.

One month after his return to Paris from exile, Thiesz died and was buried first at the cemetery of St. Ouen, Paris, and then at Père Lachaise cemetery. He was an outstanding example of a proletarian revolutionary fighter, organiser and thinker.

(*To be continued in our next issue*)

Shooting of the Communards at the Père Lachaise Cemetery

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A Short Bibliography of the Paris Commune

Jack Cohen and James Klugmann

We print below a short bibliography of books in English and French on the Paris Commune. For those who wish to make a detailed study of the Commune we recommend the extensive bibliography contained in the recent (1970) edition of *La Commune de 1871* by Jean Bruhat, Jean Dautry and Emile Tersen.

We have grouped our notes in the following order: (1) Writings by Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Commune; (2) Modern works in English; (3) Recent French Studies; (4) Some important earlier French studies that are in print at the present time; (5) Some volumes of prints and pictures; (6) Soviet studies available in French.

The items included are chosen from many hundreds. There have been very many books on different aspects of the Commune published during the last year in France. We should be grateful if readers would inform us of any titles that, in their opinion, should have been included in this brief selection, and we will include their suggestions in the April or May issues of *Marxism Today*.

I. Marx, Engels and Lenin on the Paris Commune

Most of what Marx and Engels wrote about the Paris Commune and its immediate cause—the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War (July 1870), was undertaken as part of their work as leading members of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association (the First International, 1864-1872) and on its behalf.

Their views on the Franco-Prussian War during its various stages, and the class, internationalist position they sought to develop in both the French and German sections of the International, are to be found in:

Marx—*First Address of the General Council of the International Working Men's Association on the Franco-Prussian War*, (July 1870).[1]

Marx—*Second Address of the International on the Franco-Prussian War*, (Sept. 9th, 1870).[1]

[1] Printed in both Vol. IV of *Documents of the First International* and *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (one volume edition) Lawrence and Wishart.

Marx and Engels likewise discussed this War with one another and with third parties by letter.

These can be found in:

Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence[2] especially the letters of Marx to Engels (July 20th; August 8th; August 17th, 1870), the Letters of Engels to Marx (Sept. 4th and Sept. 12th, 1870) and in the Letter of Marx to Beesly (Oct. 19th, 1870).

Marx and Engels naturally followed the establishment and the development of the Commune with the greatest enthusiasm and attention. Engels made a speech to the General Council of the International outlining the background to the establishment of the Commune, at its meeting on March 21st, 1871.[3] Immediately after the overthrow of the Commune, Marx prepared an Address (his *third* draft) which he read to the General Council at its meeting on May 30th, 1871. It was unanimously adopted as was a decision that it be printed in 1,000 copies.

In point of fact it went through three English editions between June and August 1871, as well as being translated into many other languages. On Marx's suggestion, the price of the second English edition was reduced to 2d. so as to "circulate the address as widely as possible among the working class", and a special leaflet announcing its publication and calling on British workers to read it was issued (see reproduction on p. 67).

This famous Address has gone down in history as Marx's *The Civil War n France*.[4]

On the 20th Anniversary of the Commune (March 1891), the third German edition of *The Civil War in France* was issued. For this, Engels wrote a Special *Introduction*.[5]

Again, both Marx and Engels dealt with the Commune in their correspondence. Especially famous in this connection are:

Marx —*Letters to Kugelmann* (April 12th and April 17th, 1871).

[2] Lawrence and Wishart.

[3] *Documents of the First International;* Vol. IV, pp. 160-161.

[4] Printed in both the books already referred to.

[5] This is printed along with the "Civil War" in the one-volume edition of *Selected Works of Marx and Engels*.

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Marx —*Letter to Frankel and Varlen* (May 13th, 1871).
Engels—*Letter to Terzhaghi* (January 14th, 1872).
Marx —*Letter to F. Domela-Nieuwenhuis* (February 22nd, 1881).
Engels—*Letter to E. Bernstein* (January 1st, 1884).[6]

Some lessons of the Commune were also drawn in a joint *Preface* to the German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1872 (available in the one-volume edition of the Marx-Engels *Selected Works*).

Lenin regarded the Paris Commune as an event of the greatest political and theoretical importance in relation to the struggle for Socialism and the nature of the Socialist State. He used its experiences and lessons constantly in his practical and theoretical work in preparation for and especially in defence of, the October Revolution and attacks on the Dictatorship of the Proletariat by the Mensheviks, Kautsky and bourgeois liberals. His two famous books—*The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* contain many important references to the Commune.

These and other writings on the Commune were published in a small booklet in 1931 entitled *The Paris Commune* by V. I. Lenin. This has been long out of print but all the articles can be found in various volumes of the *Collected Works of Lenin*.[7] They are:

Lenin—*Introduction to the Russian Edition of Marx's Letters to Kugelmann*. Feb. 5th (18th) 1907. (C.W.L., Vol. 12, pp. 104-112).
Lenin—*Lessons of the Commune*, March 18th, 1908. (C.W.L., Vol. 13, pp. 475-478).
Lenin—*In Memory of the Commune*, April 15th, (28th), 1911, (C.W.L., Vol. 17, pp. 139-143).

In addition Lenin treated the Commune in:
State and Revolution. (Sections headed: *The Experiences of the Paris Commune of 1871; Marx's Analysis; Supplementary Explanations by Engels; The Vulgarisation of Marxism by the Opportunists*—(C.W.L., Vol. 25, pp. 413-491).
The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky (Sections headed: *How Kautsky changed Marx into a common or garden Liberal; Bourgeois and Proletarian Democracy; Can there be Equality between the Exploiters and Exploited?* C.W.L., Vol. 28, pp. 227-256).
Speech at the 7th Congress of the Russian Communist Party (C.W.L., Vol. 27, pp. 126-139).
Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship (C.W.L., Vol. 28, pp. 457-474, especially, p. 459).
Letter to the Workers of Europe and America (C.W.L., Vol. 28, pp. 429-438 especially pp. 431-432).
The Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution (C.W.L., Vol. 24, pp. 67-71).
Report of the Council of People's Commissars to the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets (C.W.L., Vol. 26, pp. 455-456).
The Paris Commune and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat (C.W.L., Vol. 9, p. 141).

II. New Works in English

Frank Jellinek—*The Paris Commune of 1871*

Older readers will remember this fine study of the Commune published by Victor Gollancz in the Left Book Club in 1937. The same publishers are now publishing a reprint with a long new introduction by the author.[8]

Royden Harrison—*The English Defence of the Commune*

This is an anthology of writings by English contemporaries of the Commune like Bridges, Beesly and others who defended the Commune at the time. It contains an introduction and notes by Professor Royden Harrison.[9]

Roger R. Williams (editor)—*The Commune of Paris*, 1871. (John Wiley, 1969).

III. Recent French Studies

Jean Bruhat, Jean Dautry, Emile Tersen—*La Commune de 1871*[10]

This work by three French Marxist historians (one of whom, Jean Dautry, died recently) is the most complete contemporary study of the Paris Commune. It originally appeared in 1960, and the second edition, which makes use of the considerable research on the Commune that has been carried out in the past decade, has just appeared. It is a beautifully illustrated and presented work, which combines readability with erudition.

After an introduction on the period 1848-70, there are Chapters on "The Declaration of War to the Capitulation of Paris", "March 18th", "From March 18th to the Commune", "The Composition and Trends of the Leadership of the Commune", "The Commune and the People", "The Work of the Commune", "The Armed Struggle", "The Bloody Week" (May 18th-28th), "Repression", "Popular Movements in the Provinces", "The Commune and the International Proletariat, 1871", "The Aftermath", "The End and the Lessons".

In addition to the main body of the work, there is a detailed Chronology, the most extensive bibliography of the Commune to date, a list of the Commune journals, an iconography of the main

[6] All in *Selected Correspondence of Marx and Engels*.
[7] Referred to as C.W.L. in this section.
[8] Victor Gollancz, £3.00.
[9] *Merlin*, (available about April 1971) £2.25.
[10] *Editions Sociales*, Paris, 1970, 80F.

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pictures, caricatures, posters etc., and biographies of the main participants.

Georges Soria—*Grande Histoire de la Commune*

The *Livre Club Diderot* (Diderot Book Club) which has a deserved reputation not only for progressive but beautiful books, is celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Commune, by publishing a monumental five-volume large-format illustrated history, written by Georges Soria, and made living by a vast wealth of reproduction of engravings, caricatures, posters, portraits, coins, jugs, indeed of visual material of every variety.[11]

The whole will contain more than 2,000 illustrations including 100 full pages in colour. It is a worthy centenary edition.

The first volume treats the origins of the Commune, the second examines the protagonists, the third the work and problems of the Commune and its Council. These have already appeared. And of the two forthcoming volumes the fourth describes the armed struggle with Versailles up to the week of bloodshed and defeat, and the fifth, final volume discusses the repression, aftermath, and political consequences of the Commune.

Jacques Duclos—*La Commune de Paris à l'Assaut du Ciel* (The Paris Commune Storms Heaven)

The first edition of Duclos' work was published on the 90th Anniversary. The second edition is considerably extended. Besides a readable and well-documented narrative of the Commune, it sets the Commune in the context of the international working class movement.

Especially interesting are sections on world solidarity with the Commune, on the lessons drawn from the Commune by Marx, Engels and Lenin, and on the meaning of the Commune for the contemporary working class movement.[12]

Maurice Choury—*Le Paris Communard*[13]

Maurice Choury (1912-1969), son of a worker, active communist from his youth, revolutionary journalist, resistance leader, creator of Humanité-Dimanche, largely self-educated, devoted his last years to the study of the Commune.

This book, which he almost completed before his death last November, is based on contemporary journals, documents and ephemera and is a living history of the protagonists of the struggle.

Amongst his works on the Commune are "Les Origines de la Commune: Paris Livré" (Editions Sociales, 1960); "La Commune au Quartier Latin" (Ami du Livre Progressiste, 1961); "La Commune au Coeur de Paris" (Editions Sociales, 1967); "1871—Les Damnés de la Terre (posters of the Commune, Tchou, Paris, 1969); "Les Poètes de la Commune" (Seghers, 1970).

Maurice Choury—*Les Poètes de la Commune*

Maurice Choury died on November 8th, 1969, en route to address a youth meeting at Ivry on the subject of the Commune. He had just been correcting the proofs of his anthology of the poets of the Commune.[14]

It contains poems related to the Commune by well-known poets like Hugo and Rimbaud, by songwriters like J. B. Clement, by Communards who wrote from gaol like Louise Michel and Clovis Hugues, and by many an unknown fighter and writer breathing the spirit of revolutionary struggle.

He takes as watchword for his anthology the words of Hugues:

> "Dreams and action are our double mission—human and social. He who sings only to sing can perhaps be an admirable dreamer, but he can never be a poet in the deepest sense of the word".

Georges Coulonges—*La Commune en Chantant*

This study of the songs of the Commune complements that of Choury on the Commune poets.[15]

Paul Lidsky—*Les Ecrivains Contre la Commune*

The catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris lists 298 publications on the Paris Commune written in the years 1871-1873. The majority of these are violent and hysterical attacks.

Amongst some of the most slanderous attacks are those made by contemporary writers. "You are rioters whose aim is nothing but pillage and loot . . ." wrote Catulle-Mendès of the Communards. "The origins of the Commune", proclaimed Maxime du Camp, "goes back to the time of *Genesis* when Cain slew his brother". George Sand saw in the Commune "the first of an excess of material civilisation throwing its scum to the surface".

The author in this work seeks to study the reasons for these attitudes of hatred and slander, and also to examine how far they typify anti-revolutionary indictments of other periods.[16]

Tristan Rémy—*La Commune à Montmartre*

The novelist and poet Tristan Rémy describes the critical day of May 23rd, 1871, when the defences of Montmartre, considered as a pivot of Communard resistance, began to break. It contains a detailed study of the Communards of Montmartre.[17]

[11] *Livre Club Diderot*, 14b, rue du Faubourg Poissonière, Paris 10e. The work is only sold by subscription at 680F for the five volumes.

[12] Editions Sociales, Paris, 1970.

[13] Librairie Académique Perrin, Paris, 1970.

[14] *Seghers*, Paris, 1970.

[15] *Editeurs Français Réunis*, Paris, 1970.

[16] *Francois Maspéro*, Paris, 1970.

[17] Editions Sociales, Paris, 1970.

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IV Some Important Earlier Studies in French Still in Print

Les 31 Séances Officielles de la Commune de Paris

These are reports of the debates of the Commune taken from its official *Journal*. They were reprinted in 1970 by Maspéro.

Lissagaray—*Histoire de la Commune de 1871*

This is the most famous history written by a Communard. It was first published in Brussels in 1876, and in Paris in 1896. It was translated into English by Eleanor Marx, and published by Reeves and Turner in 1886. A second English edition was published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1902.

It has recently been republished in Paris by Francois Maspéro.

Jacques Rougerie—*Procès des Communards* (Trials of the Communards)

The author examined the dossiers[18] of many of the 36,000 prisoners who appeared before the "Conseils de Guerre". The study contains valuable information on the nature of the population of Paris at the time and the social composition of the Communards. His general appreciation of the Commune "as a twilight rather than a dawn" is open to discussion.

Jean Dautry and Lucien Scheler—*Le Comité Central Républicain des Vingt Arrondissements de Paris*

The authors studied for the first time the role of the political organisations close to the First International, which played an important part in the preparation of the Commune.[19] It was a key work in the development of study of the origins of the Commune.

V Prints and Pictures

Georges Pilotell—*Avant, Pendant et Après la Commune: Croquis et Caricatures* (Before, During and After the Commune: Sketches and Caricatures)

The *Livre Club Diderot* have published in folder form this collection of sketches and caricatures by the Communard Pilotell first published in 1874 in London, where he was living as an exile. The same folder contains a useful study on Pilotell as artist and Communard by Charles Feld.

1870: La Premiere Grande Guerre par L'Affiche et L'Image.

1871: La Commune ou L'Expérience du Pouvoir par L'Affiche et L'Image.

These two complementary bound folders each contain 130 reproductions of posters and caricatures and 16 facsimile lithographs and drawings. The Commune lithographs are by Courbet, Manet and Daumier.[20]

VI Two Soviet Works Available in French

E. A. Jeloubovskaia—*La Chute du Second Empire à la Naissance de la Troisième Republique en France*

This is a fundamental historical study with much information on the French working class movement from 1864-1870.[21] A useful background book for study of the Commune.

A. Z. Manfred—*Essais d'Histoire de France du XVIII^e au XX^e Siecle*

This work of a Soviet historian contains an important essay entitled "The Central Committee of the National Guard: First Revolutionary Government of the Working Class".[22]

[18] Collection Archives, Julliard, Paris, 1964.
[19] Editions Sociales, Paris, 1960.
[20] Both of these folders are published by *Editions "Les Yeux Ouverts"*, 10 rue Vivienne, Paris 11e, at 49F each.
[21] *Editions de Moscou*, Moscow, 1959.
[22] *Editions de Moscou*, 1969.

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